CORONET

ANN MONSARRAT

A fascinating look at wedding dress and custom through the ages.

AND THE BRIDE WORE

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AND THE BRIDE WORE . . .

The Story of the White Wedding

Ann Monsarrat's tremendous research, prompted by a study of what the bride has worn – or been made to wear – through the ages, has inevitably led her to touch upon other aspects of the wedding. Her book makes fascinating and occasionally highly amusing reading, and covers the story of those brides whose cultural roots stem from the Christian religion, the Jewish faith upon which that religion is based, and the pagan rights it has absorbed.

Royal weddings, village weddings – the pageantry and the atmosphere is captured by the author. Indeed as you turn the pages, you feel the very champagne of the occasion titillating your senses . . .

And the Bride wore . . .

The Story of the White Wedding

Ann Monsarrat

Abridged paperback edition

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Author's Note

In this book I use such phrases as *most brides* and *all weddings*, and in doing so I am, of course, setting myself up as a prime target for those angry armies of statisticians who will delight in pointing out that in the past 2·96 years there were 4·33 recurring more Moslem brides and 6·42 per cent more civil marriages than white weddings in Christian churches. And they may well be right.

But this is the story of the *White Wedding* and, to save a great many qualifications, when I say *most brides* please assume that I mean most brides whose cultural roots are in Europe and the Christian religion, the Jewish faith on which that religion is based, and the pagan rights it absorbed.

It would be wonderful to delve into all the wedding clothes and customs of all the peoples of the world. But that would take more than one book!

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CHAPTER ONE

O Hymen! Hymen O!
Hebrew, Greek and Roman Brides
0–410 AD

With sweet-odoured marjoram flowers
Wreathe thy beauty-radiant brow;
Seize the veil of flame-bright hue;
Joyous come with saffron shoe
Upon thy foot of snow.

Catullus: *Nuptial Song in Honour of Junia and Manlius*

Think of a bride, and what do you see? For millions of Christians, Jews, agnostics, atheists and just plain romantics all round the world the picture is the same: a radiant creature dressed in white — snowy dress and floating veil, trailing bouquet and a touch of orange blossom; something old, something new, something borrowed and something blue. Nostalgic, traditional, and, more often than not, ludicrously extravagant. Whatever else is skimped on this day of days, the bride is going to look right; a vision she and her moist-eyed mother (and, with luck, the bridegroom too) will remember for the rest of their lives. And

still, for many, many brides, there is only one way to look 'right'.

In the 1920s it was briefly the thing to get married in beach pyjamas in the South of France. A few years ago a crumpled caftan was considered (by the bride at any rate) to be just the job when a British peer's daughter married the owner of a trendy boutique. See-through tops and bulging hot-pants have found their way to the altar since, but for each one of those unblushing brides, thousands more have chosen white and all the trimmings.

Ask why, and you are likely to receive an odd look and a sharp answer. Brides dress that way because it is traditional; they always have and they always will; old as the hills; honoured through the centuries . . .

Except, it isn't.

The custom-made, white wedding, with all the frills we know so well, is not so very old. Like many a good thing, it's Victorian. It was not until the middle of last century that all the ingredients we now think of as virtually indispensable to a white wedding came together to make the great tradition. And as tradition goes, a hundred-odd years is historical peanuts.

For centuries after the Romans there was no such thing as an immediately recognisable wedding dress. The rich wore richer versions of their normal clothes; the poor, and even the middle classes, chose the best dress from their closet and made it festive with ribbons, love-knots, and a garland of flowers.

And even for a Roman bride, the dress took second place to the accessories, most of which were loaded on her head. Yellow was the wedding colour then, and an all-enveloping flame-yellow veil a bride's chief insignia. This was pulled over her face during the ceremony 'to shield the downcast looks of virgin modesty' and worn until she arrived at her new home on the night of the wedding, when it was the bridegroom's privilege to do the unveiling.

Under the veil she wore a garland of flowers (picked by herself), and under that, she had an elaborate *coiffure*

which involved dividing the hair into six locks with a special spear-shaped comb. Her shoes were important too — they had to be saffron-coloured — and she usually carried in her hand three wheat ears (wheat being one of the many symbols of fertility). The dress in between all this finery lacked significance. It had to be vertically woven and tied with a woollen girdle, but tradition decreed no special colour. [The girdle had a symbolic as well as an obvious use, according to William Vaughan. In his *Golden Grove* (published in 1608) he said 'it was fastened with a true-loves knot, the which her husband must loose. Here hence rose the Proverbe: *He hath undone her virgins girdle*; that is, of a mayde he hath made her a woman.']

Not a proverb in every-day use now perhaps, but the custom was still going strong (very strong, in fact) in Scotland at the end of the 18th century — thirteen-hundred years after the fall of the Roman Empire. There, in parts of Perthshire, all the knots about both bride and bridegroom — garters, shoe-laces, petticoat strings, the lot — were loosened before the ceremony. Afterwards, the bride went one way, her husband the other, to be discreetly tied up again by their attendants.

Ovid (43 B.C.–A.D. 17, and three times married) shows the close association in Roman minds between brides and veils in his story of the love-sick Mars (*Fasti*, Book III).

Woefully in love with Minerva, Mars confides his plight ('I burn and for a long time have nursed this wound') to old Anna Perenna, who had 'but lately been made a goddess'. Naughty old Anna, pretending to mediate, tells him that Minerva has yielded to his entreaties. 'The lover believed her and made ready the bridal chamber. Thither they escorted Anna, like a bride, with a veil upon her face. When he would have kissed her, Mars suddenly perceived Anna; now shame, now anger moved the god befooled. The new goddess laughed at dear Minerva's lover. Never had anything pleased Venus more than that.'

Not a bad joke — played *once*. But the replacement of the real bride with an ugly, old one was common practice for so long that Folk Lore specialists have a name for it: they call it 'The False Bride' (and probably add 'syndrome' afterwards). 'Slavonic, Teutonic, and Romance peoples' were especially fond of it. In Brittany they dragged the joke out even more painfully by introducing first a little girl, then the mistress of the house, and lastly the grandmother. In one district of Bavaria, a bearded man in woman's clothes was the surprise bride; and in Esthonia, the bride's brother had that honour.

A charitable explanation of the custom is that it was an attempt to fool the evil spirits and protect the real bride.

Weddings have always been considered a good excuse for a party. The Greeks looked upon theirs as sacrificial feasts to the household gods; but, whatever the name, wedding cakes appeared on the menu. These began rather humbly — the Greeks baked up a mixture of pounded grain and honey, and the Romans went one worse with grain and salt. The elaborately iced and marzipanned creations we know today didn't evolve until the 17th century.

It is usually assumed that the Romans introduced the wedding cake to Britain, along with straight roads and central heating, but Sir John Lubbock (in his *Origin of Civilization,* 1870) claimed that 'among the Iroquois, the bride and bridegroom used to partake together of a cake of "sagamite", which the bride offered to her husband. The Fiji Islanders have a very similar custom . . .' and so, he argued, if they could come up with the idea without the help of the Romans, why not the Ancient Britons?

Equally primaeval is the urge to throw things at the bride. The Hebrews combined the two customs and threw cake; and, as late as last century, cake or biscuits were still being scattered or broken over the heads of rural brides in Britain. The Greeks threw grain, fruit and sweetmeats. Roman bridegrooms had a chance to hit back; they tra-

ditionally threw nuts to the young men who formed part of the noisy procession which, as with the Greeks, accompanied the bride and groom to their new home. All these missiles were thought of as fertility symbols.

Mercifully, other customs have proved less durable — like the one of the mothers-in-law and the flaming torches. When a Greek bride was taken to her new home on her wedding night, she was accompanied by flute players — and her mother, who must have cut a pretty awesome figure: she bore torches which had been lit at the parental hearth. Judging by some vase-paintings, the entourage was met at the other end of the journey by the bridegroom's mother — also with blazing torches. To add to the conflagration, Vaughan says: 'The Grecians accustomed to burne before the doore of the newe married the axletree of that coach, wherein shee was brought to her husbands house, letting her to understand, that she was ever after to dwell there.' Quite a home-coming!

Roman mothers-of-the-bride had a less flamboyant but equally histrionic part to play: their daughters were symbolically torn from their arms before the procession set out. To her new home, the Roman bride carried three coins (which could be the origin of the silver sixpence in the shoe of more recent times): one for her husband, one for the household gods, and the third for the gods of the nearest crossroads. When she arrived, she rubbed the doorposts with grease or fat (to slip up those evil spirits) and 'decked them with fillets' (decorated them with ribbons). She was then carried over the threshold — a custom said (even by the Romans) to have its origin in the rape of the Sabine women and to 'signifie that she lost her virginity and unwillingly'; but it was much more likely to have been done to prevent the ill-omen of a stumble on the new doorstep. (Sir John Lubbock said the 'Redskins of Canada, the Chinese, and the Abyssinians' also carried their brides over the threshold.) In Roman times the actual lifting was a group effort, rather than the one-man job it has now (if possible) become.

All this jollity was accompanied by a chorus of maidens singing the praises of the bride and groom and entreating Hymen, god of marriage, to look upon the union with an especially benign eye.

The conquering Romans brought their customs with them to Britain, and many of them took root. Some are still with us, and most of them were already ancient when the Romans themselves adopted them. One item, the garland of flowers, had been worn by both Jewish and heathen brides, and was to remain in favour, almost without interruption, to the present day. In some countries, however, there was slight variation: the bride was delivered up to her husband not in a wreath of flowers, but in a crown of 'prickles', that he might know he had 'tied himself to a thorny plesure'.

CHAPTER TWO

Marriage by Purchase
The Anglo-Saxons
200–1000 AD

A king shall buy a queen with goods,
with beakers and bracelets; both shall
first be generous with gifts.

From: *The Exeter Book*

When Rome pulled her legions out of Britain in A.D. 410 the Anglo-Saxons took over as the next power bloc. To begin with they were a pretty rough lot — almost as rough as the ancient Britons they ruled — but by the end of the 6th century a slightly more gracious age was dawning. The country was gradually being converted to Christianity and the church was beginning to weave itself into people's lives. One of the first things it took on was weddings.

The Roman upper classes had been married by priests and offered nuptial sacrifices to the gods, but the average Briton went about matrimony in a far more direct and purely secular manner. He believed in marriage by capture. A man saw a girl he fancied, rode off with her and argued later. The argument usually proved long and

bloody, involving whole clans in savage feuds; but nothing is so bad that someone can't see a gleam of goodness in it. A marvellously prosy Victorian writer, John Cordy Jeaffreson (in *Brides and Bridals*, 1872) admitted 'it cannot be questioned that marriage by force was miserably fruitful of domestic feuds and private animosities'. But . . . 'Against his inconvenience may be set an advantage which the apologists of marriage by capture may fairly claim for the institution. The duty of wifely submissiveness to marital authority was impressively inculcated in the system that authorised suitors to subdue their mistresses with blows, and required women to accept meekly and without reference to their own secret predilections the rule of their captors. There was small likelihood of a need to kill the cat after marriage, when its nine lives had been so thoroughly taken by the matrimonial process. The system, moreover, spared wives the bitterness of perceiving a diminution of tenderness on the part of their lords after marriage. The bride captured against her will would not cherish unreasonable expectations of happiness in wedlock. Nor would she probably have grounds in the future for complaining that her master was less considerate of her feelings as a husband than he had shown himself as a lover.'

Anglo-Saxon fathers were not so blissfully philosophical. Marriage by capture might be all right for marauding tribes, but to a man busy establishing a more settled community, the loss of a daughter was the loss of a valuable asset. She helped to run the house and farm, spin the flax and wool (hence the word spinster), weave the cloth and make the clothes. If she went, he wanted compensation. And so, in place of marriage by capture, came marriage by purchase.

Like most new ideas it gained ground slowly. Judging by the laws passed at the time, there were many who thought the old ways best, and stuck to them. Ethelbert, King of Kent, decreed at the end of the 6th century, that any man guilty of 'carrying away a maid by force' should

'pay fifty shillings to her owner, and afterwards buy her from him'. If he carried off a married woman, he could keep her, but only if he provided a replacement, at his own cost, for the injured husband.

Young men trying honourably to follow the new customs had to be protected too. To safeguard husbands who had been lured into buying girls who weren't all they'd been said to be, another of Ethelbert's laws ordained that for a marriage to be binding, it must have been made 'without guile' on the seller's part. 'But if there be deceit, let him bring her home again, and let the man give back his money.' (An early version of the Trades Descriptions Act! Just how long the groom could keep his bridal trial offer before returning the goods as unsound, was not made clear.) Ethelbert himself had married a Christian (Bertha, daughter of Charibert, King of Paris), and became the celebrated convert of St. Augustine. But, to his unconverted subjects, all these new regulations must have seemed very radical indeed.*

For those who accepted the new style of marriage this is how it worked. The family elders made the match and, after a great deal of haggling, fixed the bride price. This settled, the money was handed over at the betrothal, or *handfasting*, ceremony, together with as many other presents of jewellery or cattle as the father of the groom-to-be thought suitable to his social and financial position. The bargain was sealed with a drink ('wet bargains' have always been considered more binding than dry ones), and a kiss. The kiss was important. If it didn't take place and the parties later decided not to marry, both of them had to return all the gifts given during the betrothal. If the kiss had been exchanged, the man still had to return all the gifts he had received, but the girl only had to give back half the presents given to her. (According to J. S. Burn's *History of Parish Registers*, this law still held good in 1835

* Another law of this time forbade widows to remarry until one year after the death of the previous husband. The law is no longer with us, but the sentiment lingers on.

when magistrates in Exeter ordered a man to return the watch he had received from his fiancée, but decided she need only pay back half the value of a brooch she'd had from him.)

The *handfasting* usually took place when the prospective bride and groom were very young, and often many years before the actual marriage. (Which led to more laws having to be passed: unscrupulous fathers had time to sell promising daughters to several suitors before they reached marriageable age, and so, eventually, the money was handed over at the wedding ceremony instead.) But despite the youth of the couple, betrothals were taken very seriously. It was the *handfasting*, not the marriage ceremony, which produced the exchange of vows which are now part of the Anglican wedding service.

And it was the *handfasting* which produced the word 'wed'. This originally meant the pledge, the sum of money handed over to the girl's father. Later it also came to mean the ring which was given at the same time, and which was worn on the bride-to-be's right hand until the marriage. During the wedding ceremony, the groom transferred the 'wed' to the bride's left hand, holding it in turn over the tips of the thumb and the first two fingers and saying 'in the name of the Father', for the thumb; 'in the name of the Son', for the index finger;'in the name of the Holy Ghost', for the middle finger; and, finally, 'Amen', as he slipped it into place on the third finger. This nice little ceremony is still continued in the Catholic marriage service. Happily, the Anglo-Saxon bridegroom's next trick is not: having been handed one of the bride's slippers by her father (to signify the transfer of authority), he bopped the bride smartly on the head with it (to signify that he was now her master). The 'weapon' was later carried into the bridal chamber and placed over the bed — on the husband's side, of course, in keeping with its symbolic character. But 'by way of practical joke', says Thomas Wright, in his *Womankind in Western Europe*, 'when the lady was accused of being rather tyrannical in

temper, some facetious individual sometimes stole into the room, and slyly transferred the shoe to the other side.'

John Cordy Jeaffreson confidently explained how the shoe got into the act in the first place: 'It is needless to observe that this symbolic use of the shoe was an old Israelitish custom, and still prevails in Oriental lands. My readers will remember how Ruth's kinsman plucked off his shoe, as a sign that he transferred a right. "Now this was the manner in former time in Israel concerning redeeming and concerning changing, for to confirm all things: a man plucked off his shoe and gave it to his neighbour; and this was a testimony in Israel." Nor can they fail to see the aptitude of the symbol, when used to make the transmission of power over a human creature. The covering of the foot was the instrument with which a victor, putting his heel on the neck of a conquered enemy, would demonstrate the subjugation of the fallen foe.'

A charming picture! Especially when applied to marriage. But there is no doubt it could be the origin of the curious custom of tying old boots to the bumpers of honeymoon cars. The Victorians used to throw shoes after the bridal pair as they drove off in their carriage; and long before that German brides tossed a shoe in the way modern brides throw their bouquet — if it was caught by an unmarried girl, she would, so they said, be the next to find a husband.

Today's bride usually aims her bouquet at the bridesmaids — and bridesmaids are another tradition we owe to the Anglo-Saxons. The Romans had surrounded their young girls with chaste matrons (Catullus's 'Matrons! who have faithful been To your faithful husbands'), but an Anglo-Saxon bride had unmarried friends about her, the senior one attending for several days beforehand to help make the decorations for the feast — and the floral garlands.

The bride was crowned with one of these wreaths after the blessing in church — and so was her husband. According to Dr. Brand: 'After the benediction in the church,

both the bride and the bridegroom were crowned with crowns of flowers, kept in the church for that purpose.' If she were freeborn, the bride wore hers over long, loose hair. (Daughters of bondsmen were not allowed this privilege: they had to have their hair close-cropped at all times. And married women 'as soon as matrimony had qualified their freedom with something of servile condition: were expected to wear their hair up and covered.)

The veil disappeared with the Romans, but some kind of shield for shy brides was still considered necessary. The Anglo-Saxons decided to include the bridegroom in this, too. Again according to Dr. Brand: 'Among the Anglo-Saxons the nuptial benediction was performed under a veil, or square piece of cloth, held at each corner by a tall man over the bridegroom and bride, to conceal her virgin blushes; but if the bride was a widow, the veil was esteemed useless.' This kind of veil — called a Care Cloth — was probably the Christian version of the canopy used in ancient Hebrew weddings, and still used in Jewish ceremonies today. Leon Modena in the *Rites of the Jews* (1650) says: 'There is a square vestment called Taleth, with pendents about it, put over the head of the bridegroom and bride together.'

To begin with Anglo-Saxons went to church only to have their weddings blessed, but gradually the priests took over the whole operation. They started out as witnesses at the betrothal and marriage ceremonies, moved on to joining the hands and blessing the ring; soon they were making the rules and turning a business agreement into a full religious rite.

They were also keeping an eye on the festivities which followed the wedding. Jeaffreson called these 'gross and riotous banquets at which the earls and thanes of old time caroused riotously and drank to stupefaction in honour of the newly married couples' and the 18th century antiquary, Joseph Strutt, said that after an Anglo-Saxon nuptial feast 'the remaining part of the day was spent by the

youth of both sexes in mirth and dancing, while the graver sort sat down to their drinking bout, in which they highly delighted'.

The poetry of the time leaves a more mellow impression of those gatherings in the great halls; it tells of warriors lounging on the long benches which ranged the shadowy rooms, listening to the minstrels' tales of heroic battles and lands beyond the seas, drinking mead and beer from gleaming metal goblets. Always gold is mentioned — the ceiling of the great hall is 'gold-decked'; the goblets are of 'twisted gold'; the women 'gold-adorned, bedecked with rings' — it is easy to picture the lustre of it winking through the smoke from the open fires; shining on the rich, natural dyes of the clothes. Easy, too, to picture the wife of the giver of the feast circulating amongst the men, like the queen in *Beowulf* ('gold-adorned ... the free-born queen of the people'), filling their cups from the flagon she carries, bidding them 'be of good cheer at the beer-banquet'. The beginning of the party must have had great simple dignity. But it obviously didn't last. The Church was already hot with indignation, already issuing decrees to stamp out the unseemly levity which followed. Dancing, especially, it viewed with the sternest disapproval.

In this department, however, it was fighting a losing battle.

CHAPTER THREE

The Age of Chivalry
1000–1500 AD

> Three ornaments longe pryncypaly to a wyfe: a ring on hir fyngery a broch on hir brest; and a garlond on hir hede.
>
> *Dialogue of Dives and Pauper* (1493)

For the rich and for royalty, Mediaeval weddings were magnificent affairs, splendid with all the trappings of this Age of Chivalry. Relatives, surrounded by sprawling trains of retainers, strutting knights and household clergy, travelled hundreds of miles to take part in the feasting and the jousting. Great tournaments were held lasting days or even weeks; enormous banquets were given: at Westminster on St. Clement's day 1243, 'Thirty-thousand dishes were got ready for those who sat down to dinner' at the wedding of Queen Eleanor's sister, Cynthia, and the Earl Richard. The *trousseau* was firmly established and, now that the girls of noble families were being brought up to be decorative rather than useful, the dowry had come into being. Fathers were having to pay to get rid of their daughters.

Just how lavishly the bride was dressed depended on

the position — both social and financial — of her father; this was the time of rigid sumptuary laws which detailed exactly who could wear what. During the reign of Edward III (1327–77) Knights whose possessions were below the yearly value of 251 marks were not allowed 'cloth of gold, nor clothes, mantle, nor gold furred with miniver, nor of ermine, nor no apparel bordered of stone, nor otherwise' and nor were their families. Knights and their Ladies who possessed 400 marks annually, could wear what they wished, with the one restriction that 'ermine and letuses* and apparel of pearl and stone' were to be worn on the head, only. Esquires had to have 200 marks a year before they could wear 'cloth of silk and silver, ribband, girdle, and other apparel reasonably garnished with silver'. Tradesmen and their wives had to be content with the skins of 'lambs, rabbits, cats, and foxes'. Later, under Henry VII, no one below the rank of knight was permitted to wear silk shirts — 'upon peine of forfeityre therof'.

White was not yet thought of as the bridal colour, but it was worn by at least one bride: King Henry IV's daughter, Princess Philippa, married Eric of Denmark in 1406, when she was 12 years old, wearing 'a tunic and mantle with long train of white satin worked with velvet, furred with pured miniver and purfled with ermine; and the sleeves of the tunic also furred with ermine' (*Archaeologia*, Vol. 47, which has a valuable list of the young Princess's *trousseau*, too).

Garlands and free flowing hair were still considered the chief insignia of a bride — it was often said of a girl that 'she married in her hair' — though tapestries and paintings of the time show that many an upper-class bride preferred something more sophisticated, choosing instead one of the beautifully elaborate winged or conical headdresses which we associate with the Middle Ages.

* *Letuses* — a type of greyish-white fur, probably that of the pole-cat or snow weasel.

The handing over of the dowry now took place in the church porch, and so, for king and commoner alike, did the exchange of marriage vows. Some said this was done to keep commercialism out of the body of the church, while others thought a more likely cause was the tricky business of the priests granting permission for man and wife to sleep together. The vows exchanged, everyone moved inside the building for the nuptial mass.

The decrees issued by the Catholic Church during the Middle Ages show just how determined it was to gain complete control. Not content with regulating how people should marry, it was now busily deciding who should marry — or, rather, who should not. The Saxons had begun it by forbidding marriage between first cousins; then, in the 11th century, marriages between second cousins were prohibited; a little later even third cousins could not marry without papal dispensation.

If it were discovered — no matter how long after the event — that couples within the forbidden degrees of consanguinity had married, the marriage was automatically null and any children declared illegitimate. To complicate matters further, as matrimony was said to make husband and wife one flesh, so her relatives became his, and *vice versa*; which meant that a widow or widower could not marry the first, second or third cousin of the deceased partner. To compound the complication, god-parents were also looked upon as blood relations. A man and a woman who had stood as god-parents to the same child could not marry each other — though, under these rules, one would have thought they should have done so, and quickly. A god-father certainly could not marry his god-daughter — this was incest just as surely as if the actual father had perpetrated the act. And, if a couple had naughtily slept together out of wedlock (or within a marriage which was later annulled by the church) they could not in future marry cousins of their partners within the prohibited degrees.

Child betrothals were still common practice, and these

too could cause hopeless confusion in the children's later lives. The real trouble here was that there were two forms of betrothal ceremony, the difference resting in whether the vows were exchanged in the present or future tense. If the latter were used, the contract could be set aside if the parties decided not to go ahead with the wedding. If, however, the vows were exchanged in the present tense, these were binding for all time — even if they had only been exchanged privately. A couple, however young, who had promised, in the present tense, to marry each other, could marry no one else — ever. If they agreed to keep their vows secret and went ahead with other marriages, it only needed two malicious, unknown witnesses to inform against them to make their unions illegal and immoral. Often the testimony of just one witness was accepted. The young couple did not have to marry each other, but they were allowed to marry no one else until the death of one set the other free.

This labyrinth of chaos was bliss for those of the clergy who enjoyed intrigue and meddling. It was lucrative, too: dispensations, annulments, or a blind eye were all on offer from the church — at a price; a service which some members of the laity were quick to turn to their own advantage. All these rules remained in being until the Reformation, and Margaret Tudor, Henry VIII's sister, was to provide a classic example of how to manipulate them. The widow of James IV of Scotland, she had her second marriage to the Earl of Angus, annulled on a fictional plea of a previous betrothal. She was then able to get rid of her third husband, Lord Methuen, by proving to a spiritual court that he was a cousin eight degrees removed (i.e., third cousin) to the Earl of Angus, whose union with her had been proved no marriage at all. With a lady like her in the family, it is difficult to understand how Henry VIII ever got into such a mess.

However, for anyone wanting to marry and stay married, the path to the altar was littered with booby-traps. The impossibility of keeping tabs on all those third

cousins, real or church invented, gave urgent meaning to the request in the marriage service for anyone knowing of any 'just cause or impediment' why the wedding should not go forward 'to speak now, or for ever hold thy peace'. Nowadays, it lacks drama; then it must have been an absolute show-stopper.

The publishing of banns also became vitally important. This wasn't a new idea — the Carthaginian Tertullian (*c.* 160 – A.D. 230) said that in his time all marriages were considered clandestine that were not announced in church beforehand — but in the Middle Ages it must have provided an essential opportunity for the whole community to start counting on their fingers and unravelling complicated lines of descent.

Walter Reynolds, Archbishop of Canterbury from 1313–27, ordered that every wedding should be preceded by the reading of the banns on three consecutive Lord's days or holidays; and that marriages should be celebrated at church, with reverence, in daylight, and in the face of the congregation. Priests, he said, should use the threat of excommunication to prevent clandestine betrothals and marriages; and any priest breaking any of the church's laws — especially by knowingly performing illegal marriages — would be punished.

Neither flock nor clergy appears to have sprung immediately to heel. The next two Archbishops of Canterbury, after Reynolds, found it necessary to issue even sterner edicts on exactly the same theme.

Rigid laws usually produce their own antidote, and in this case the answer was the *specialis licentia* — the special licence. By the early 14th century, these were already available for people with plenty of money and a position of influence. Then, as now, they allowed a couple to be married anywhere, at any time, and without the formality of announcing it beforehand.

But however they married — whether by special licence in private, or openly before the congregation of the parish church — both bride and groom qualified their vows with

the phrase 'if holy church it will ordain', a necessary reservation, even when everything possible had been done before the wedding to ensure its legality. The vows themselves have changed very little over the years, as is shown by this eerie echo of the present-day ceremony, taken from a Missal of Richard II's reign (1377–99):

Bridegroom: 'Ich M. take the N. to my wedded wyf, to haven and to holden, for fayrere, for ſouler, for bettur for wors, for richer for porer, in seknesse and in helthe, for thys tyme forward, til dethe us depart, ȝif holi-chirche will it orden; and ȝerto iche pliȝt the my̍ treuthe.'

The bride added one more promise: to be 'bonlich and buxum in bed and at burde' — meek and obedient in bed and at board.

Which only goes to show that some things may change, but others stay the same.

CHAPTER FOUR

White for the Pure Young Maid
The Sixteenth Century

Thy smock of silk, both fair and white,
With gold embroidered gorgeously;
Thy petticoat of sendal right;
And thus I bought thee gladly.

Thy purse and eke thy gay gilt knives,
Thy pincase gallant to the eye;
No better wore the burgess wives,
And yet thou wouldst not love me.

Anon: *Greensleeves*

In England, this was the age of the Tudors — the time of Henry VIII and the Virgin Queen. The upstart Henry VII had already been on the throne for fifteen years when the 16th century dawned; his grand-daughter, Queen Elizabeth, was to sweep the country gloriously into the 17th. It was a time of discovery, widening horizons and growing prosperity. The new wealth was reflected throughout social life, and weddings benefitted from it along with everything else. People were able to marry earlier; even the poor could celebrate in some style now that special houses were provided, next to the church, for

wedding parties; and the new nobility, though busy building up family dynasties — and vast palaces in which to house them — was charitably minded: in their lifetime, the rich supplied dowries and wedding feasts for their servants, and when they died they left sums 'for poor maydens to marry'. After the Reformation, anxious souls still left money for Masses to be said 'if this be legal'; it wasn't, and these sums, too, were turned into dowries for poor girls.

And it was now that 'white' and 'weddings' began to join forces. It was not yet thought of as the bridal colour, but by the end of the century it was so firmly established as the symbol of pure young maidenhood that it became the automatic choice for a great many brides. That may seem rather a quibble, but there was still a long way to go before 'dressed all in white' met with the immediate reaction 'Ah, here comes the bride'; to an Elizabethan, 'dressed all in white' meant 'Ah, here we have a pure young maid — a virgin' — marriage had nothing to do with it. But it was the start, the very first sprouting of what was to become the great white wedding tradition. Queen Elizabeth herself, with her red hair and pale skin, wore white to enormous advantage; she also inspired a cult of romantic virginity which affected everything at her court (except the love-life of her courtiers); the combination was seized on by the poets, who immortalised her, her colouring and the colour white in one great poetic package.

Mary Queen of Scots, another regal red-head, wore a gown 'as white as lilies' when she married the young Dauphin of France in 1558 — and defied tradition to do so, for white was then the mourning colour for French queens. Even so, she didn't set an immediate fashion for all royal French brides to follow; there was still plenty of competition to the virgin trend, and even if the bride did wear white, it wasn't quite the pure and pristine affair we imagine today. When Mary's youngest sister-in-law, the celebrated Marguerite de Valois, married Henri of Navarre, she was certainly robed in white — white ermine,

no less — but this was 'covered by a great blue coat with four ells of train'. Less noble brides also went in for various kinds of colourful decoration. Sometime around 1580, John Heywood made a list of all the bits and pieces women managed to drape around themselves — and it sounds like a mad inventory of a 20th century handbag:

> Silken swathbonds, ribands and sleeve-laces,
> Girdles, knives, purses, and pin-cases.

These, together with gloves, garters and scarves, all decorated wedding dresses, too. After the marriage ceremony, the swathbonds (silk 'swaddling bands', worn round the waist), ribbons, sleeves-laces and garters were scrambled for by the guests, who wore whatever they could grab as trophies for the rest of the festivities. Garters were the most prized of all: if the bride were lucky, these went last, as she made her escape to bed; if she were unlucky, she lost them before she left the altar.

Dr. Brand, the 18th century antiquary, commenting on this trophy-hunting — a custom which 'strongly marks the grossness of manner that prevailed among our ancestors' — said the young men used 'to strive, immediately after the ceremony, who could first pluck off the bride's garters from her legs. This was done before the very altar. The bride was generally gartered with ribands for the occasion. Whoever were so fortunate as to be victors in this singular species of contest, during which the bride was often obliged to scream out, and was very frequently thrown down, bore them about the church in triumph.' A Yorkshire clergyman told him in the late 18th century that 'to prevent this very indecent assault', it was usual for a bride married at his church 'to give garters out of her bosom'. Brand thought the whole idea was probably 'a fragment of the ancient ceremony of loosening the virgin zone, or girdle, a custom that needs no explanation'.

More important — though not as much fun — as

garters, were new gloves. Everyone was given them: the bride, the attendants, the guests, and the parson. (It was not unknown for a parson to refuse to perform the ceremony until he had made sure of his.) They were lovely things, made of soft leather, with wide gauntlet cuffs, richly embroidered and often jewelled. A bride had 'no rarity worth observance, if her gloves be not miraculous and singular', said John Stephens in his *Plaine Countrey Bride.*

A new dress, however, was not considered essential, which was just as well for fine cloth and trimmings were relatively expensive and 16th century fashions took a lot of material. Mary Queen of Scots, always generous with her ladies, paid £125 for the wedding dress of her favourite bed-chamber woman, Margaret Carwood in 1567 (and attended the marriage, even though it did take place the day after Darnley's murder and the massive gunpowder explosion at Kirk o' Field); and when the Lady Jean Gordon married Bothwell (just two years before Mary herself became the wife of that artful man), the Queen presented her with eleven ells ($13\frac{3}{4}$ yds.) of cloth-of-silver for her wedding gown.

But if every bride could not afford a new dress, a garland of leaves or flowers was available to all, and these were still popular, especially in the country — city girls now usually chose to top their long, loose hair with a plain golden circlet or a small cap garnished with gold lace. In France, a bride with no dowry was said to bring her husband a chaplet of roses, and these were most favoured flowers on both sides of the Channel: the rose, together with myrtle, was said to have been 'dedicated by antiquitie' to Venus, goddess of love, and was therefore particularly suitable. In England, gilded wheat ears (heathen symbols of fertility) were highly regarded, too, even though Puritan preachers firmly instructed that 'sweet smelling flowers' with their 'native fragrance' were preferable to those 'gilded with the art of man'.

Rosemary, for remembrance, also had a star part to

play: it was worn by the bridemen, blessed by the priest, floated in the 'knitting cup' (the wine or ale drunk by bride and groom to celebrate the union), carried in the wedding procession, and, together with flowers, was cast at the feet of the bride. The young girls who did the casting were, no doubt, forerunners of today's miniscule flower-girls who hold tight to their baskets of blooms (decorative, rather than decorating). A nice alternative to herbs and flowers was the strewing of the bridal path with symbols of the bridegroom's trade: bits of old iron went before a blacksmith, pieces of cloth before a tailor, wood shavings before a carpenter, and so on.

The procession itself was a splendidly boisterous affair, with a vast company of young friends and relatives surrounding the beribboned bride as she walked to church between two young, unmarried boys, and returned between two married men. (The bridegroom, in the same procession, had unmarried girls to lead him to the church, and married women to see him home again.) Wreaths of flowers and wheat, bride-cakes, the great silver drinking cup, and a sizeable branch of rosemary, often gilded again, and tied about with fluttering ribbons in the bride's chosen colours, were carried on high, fore and aft the bride, and the whole parade was accompanied by a great 'noyse of musicians', with harps and lutes, fiddles, cymbals and drums, which followed the wedding party right into the church and gave reformist preachers plenty to thunder about — especially as most weddings were celebrated on Sundays and so caused a particularly unseemly uproar and hindrance 'in matters pertayning to God'.

As Catholic and Protestant took turn-and-turn-about, the laws (including those governing matrimony) were changed to suit the beliefs of whoever was in power. On the sidelines were the Puritans, who agreed with the Anglicans almost as little as they approved of the Catholics. And the start of all the chaos was, of course, a marriage: by humbling the priests, Henry VIII hoped to persuade the Pope to annul his union with Catherine of Aragon.

Normally, the Pope would have been accommodating; Catherine was the widow of Henry's elder brother, which left the kind of useful loophole needed in these cases. But the lady had powerful support from the Holy Roman Emperor as well as her own royal Spanish family, and eventually the Pope said no; and so, came the Reformation.

Curiously, although Henry's first church reforms had the effect of making marriage easier, they also made divorce more difficult. He did away with the restrictions — which had previously left only about 32 weeks in which people could marry (without — once again — getting a dispensation); and he also did away with *de praesenti* betrothals — the kind at which the vows were exchanged in the present tense and were therefore binding for ever. These had proved particularly fertile ground for annulments (as we have seen in the previous chapter) and, had he left them alone, they might well have come in useful in his own subsequent matrimonial adventures.

Unlike the close seasons for weddings, which were never reinstated in England (no act of Parliament or canon of the Anglican church has since prohibited marriage at any time of the year), *de praesenti* betrothals were brought back soon after Henry's death.

Their absence had led to much loose behaviour, which the Puritans, especially, were quick to seize on and denounce in passionate sermons. 'The devil hath crept in', they warned. It was a tocsin which appears to have been more successful in the towns than in the country, for an American professor, turning a Kinseyish eye to old parish registers, recently announced that 33 per cent of brides in the village of Colyton arrived at the altar pregnant, while only 13 per cent in the city of York were so encumbered. Though the church could not be happy that so many of the flock were allowing 'the wickedde to sow hys ungracious sede in the meane season', they were delighted with the result — for procreation was the patriotic theme of the age.

Unlike today, when we are constantly threatened that there won't even be standing room for the world's teeming millions in a few years time, Tudor England was seriously underpopulated; a fact which led Cardinal Pole, in the time of Henry VIII, to advocate a tax on bachelors.

The money gained from such taxation, suggested the good Cardinal, should 'be dystrybutyd partely to them wych have more chyldur then they be wel abul to nurysch, and partely to the dote of pore damosellys and vyrgynys'.

It was an interesting idea but, rather than trying to limit the joys of bachelorhood, Cardinal Pole might have been better occupied making marriage itself more appealing. The religious upheavals made matrimony a worrisome business for many young couples, who were only too eager to fall in with the desire to see them joined in holy wedlock and adding to the 'polytyke body', but who wanted to do it within their own religion. The Catholic church said that the only valid marriage was one performed by a Catholic priest, yet after Henry VIII's break with Rome only Anglican marriages were recognised, and in the England of Elizabeth I, Catholic priests were not supposed to exist at all. The Puritans were miserable because they refused to use the new *Book of Common Prayer* — in which was the now obligatory marriage service. Most Catholics overcame their difficulties by being married in secrecy by Catholic priests who had gone under cover. The Pope gave his blessing out of consideration for the peculiar difficulties of the faithful, but the unions were highly irregular, no banns being called and no licence bought. The Puritans, likewise, secretly used their own service and did without the wedding ring, which they looked on as a heathen device. Those who could square it with their consciences, submitted to a ceremony in the reformed church, too, to ensure legality and peace with the neighbours.

While Catholic Mary was on the throne, the whole thing was thrown into reverse. But this resurrection of the

Catholic religion did not last long, for Mary died young after a reign of less than five years. When her Protestant half-sister, Elizabeth succeeded her, the Pope immediately declared her illegitimate and claimed the right of disposing of the crown himself, England being, he said, a fief of the holy see. A lot of people agreed with his first point (Elizabeth was, after all, the daughter of Anne Boleyn for whom Henry had divorced Catherine of Aragon and rearranged the English religion); but he ruined his case with the second. Zenophobia united the country behind the new Queen — and the new religion. The Anglican church and its *Book of Common Prayer* took such firm root that not all the Stuarts nor Oliver Cromwell could effectively rip it up again! The Church of England marriage service has remained virtually unchanged since this time (though, happily, it is no longer the only recognised service).

At the weddings of poor couples (according to Vaughan) the guests 'at the very instant of marriage doe cast their presents into a bason, dish, or cup, which standeth upon the Table in the Church ready prepared for that purpose. But this custome is onely put in use amongst them, which stand in need'.

Another way for needy brides and grooms to raise money was to give a bride-ale. These were usually held in the church itself, immediately after the wedding ceremony, and worked on the same psychological principle as sherry mornings or charity balls: provide a good cause, a party atmosphere and plenty to drink, and then send round the collection box. Then, as now, it was a popular way of raising funds — there were church-ales, to replenish the parish coffers; clerk-ales, to pay the parish clerk; bid-ales, to bail out a bankrupt or pay for a village project; and bride-ales which paid for themselves and left something over to start the young couple off in their new home.

Often the guests brought the food as well as paying for their drinks, in which case wedding cakes would certainly have been among the donated dishes. At the beginning of

the century, these were rather uninteresting dry biscuits, baked more for the pleasure of breaking them over the bride's head than for eating; but during Elizabeth's reign eggs, sugar, currants and spices were used, turning them into something of a delicacy. They were still used as missiles, though: if they weren't crumbled over the poor bride's head at the party, they were thrown at her as she crossed the threshold.

Towards the end of the century, many parishes built, or set aside, a house close to the church especially for bride-ales and if the celebrations were held in one of these, or at the home of the bride, a bride-bush or bride-stake was placed outside to attract passers-by and so increase the revenue. The 'bush' (a green bough of a tree or shrub) was the sign used by regular ale-houses to advertise their wares — as it still is today in all the old *Bull and Bush* inn-signs round the country; and a 'stake' was a pole with a leafy branch attached to the top. There was often dancing round the bride-stake, as round a May-pole, and the male guests also wore off their high spirits by running races and taking part in country sports, like tilting at the quintain.

A good send-off to married life was obviously considered essential for everyone — and that, happily, included servants. They may not have rated quite the celebrations given for the children of the house, but they didn't do badly. Many of the letters of the 16th century show how the head of the household rallied his family and friends to give his servants a wedding day to remember and a nest-egg to build on.

Servants and the poor of the district also benefited from the weddings of the rich, when food and ale were liberally distributed for several days. For the wealthy, there was still the pageantry of grand tilts and tourneys during the day, and now lavish *masques* were added to the evening entertainment. These exotic fantasies, full of allegory and rhyming couplets — like the one Prospero conjured from the air for Ferdinand and Miranda in *The Tem-*

pest — were especially favoured by Queen Elizabeth, even though, having opted for celebrated virginity herself (a fact she wished proclaimed in her epitaph), Her Majesty did not at all approve of other people's urge for matrimony. Married clergy, that strange new phenomenon of the Reformation, she found it difficult to be polite to, and insisted they keep their wives in private lodgings, well away from their official residences. The married clergy themselves, having done the deed, often felt equally embarrassed. Roger Hacket (who once told brides to wear 'sweet smelling flowers' not those 'gilded with the art of man'), was a forceful character, yet he was so ashamed when he married, he could not bring himself to tell his patron of his 'misbehaviour'.

Most of Elizabeth's subjects, however, felt no such inhibitions. They married with pride, celebrated with zest, and bedded with much publicity. From morn till night, and almost till morn again, the drums throbbed and the fiddlers played. There was such a deal of wild dancing, of running and leaping and lifting up and 'discoveringe of the damesels appareil' that an onlooker might well have thought, as did the religious reformers of the day, that the entire party had 'caste all shame behind them and were become starke madde' and out of their wits.

There was a saying at this time that older, still unmarried sisters of the bride should dance barefoot at the wedding; this would presumably change their luck and get husbands for them, too. Old maids were not highly regarded in this world or the next: in the latter, it was said, they were destined to lead apes in hell.

Many odd customs also attended the bedding of the bride. One of the most curious was that the bride's attendants should take all the pins from her hair and clothes and throw them away — if any were left about the bride her marriage would not be a happy one, and if any of the attendants kept one, they were doomed to spinsterhood, at least until the next Whitsuntide. The bride escaped from the wedding party at night, losing what garters and

ribbons she still had about her on the way, and was helped to prepare for bed by her bridesmaids. The bridegroom was assisted by his attendants in another room. Then, seated side by side in the marriage bed, husband and wife, whatever their rank, held court. Among the *Articles ordained by King Henry VII for the Regulation of his Household* is one concerning the bedding of newly married princesses: only women should be allowed in the bedchamber, it instructed, until the bride and bridegroom (he 'in his shirte, with a gowne cast about him') were safely in bed; then the bishop and his chaplains could enter to bless the bed, after which everyone had to leave 'without any drinke', except the married couple 'if they liste privately'.

Getting the marriage-bed blessed was often a problem for Henry's less exalted subjects who could not call on a bishop to do the job for them. According to an old document concerning the clergy in papal times: 'The pride of the clergy and the bigotry of the laity were such that newmarried couples were made to wait till midnight, after the marriage-day, before they would pronounce a benediction, unless handsomely paid for it, and they durst not undress without it, on pain of excommunication.'

King Henry's subjects would also have had trouble trying to stop their guests drinking in the bridal chamber. Sipping the posset (a drink made of hot wine, milk, eggs, sugar and spices) was the traditional sign-off to the wedding day for the bride and groom, their family and attendants, and as many of the guests as could crowd into the bedroom. (The wine was said to fortify the bridegroom, and the sugar to make him kind.) After that, came the flinging of the stocking — a game to see who would be the next to marry, which varied slightly in different parts of the country: it always involved the young attendants throwing stockings over their shoulders and trying to hit the head, or specifically the nose, of the bride and groom as they lay in bed; but sometimes the bridesmaids, one by one, threw the bride's left hose with the bride's nose as the target; and sometimes, the men aimed at the bride's head

or nose with her stocking, while the bridesmaids aimed at the groom with his. Whoever got the correct head or nose with the correct stocking, was next in line for the altar. At the kind of weddings the Puritans kept such an eager eye on, there would still be no peace for the new-married couple, even after the last stocking had been flung, the last drop of posset drunk, the last guest shooed from the room and the chamber door finally closed. Then was the time for 'unmannerly and restless people' to stand outside the door and 'sing vicious and naughty ballads that the devil may have his whole triumph now to the uttermost'.

During the reigns of the Stuarts, many other jolly games and tricks were practised — like sewing the couple into the sheets and tying a bell beneath the marriage bed; but the Tudors, even the rumbustious Elizabethans, were slightly more restrained. Shakespeare, who could turn a bawdy phrase with the best of them, has weddings in many of his plays, but they are nearly always serious, even sedate, occasions. (The exception is *The Taming of the Shrew*, and here Petruchio's outrageous behaviour is all part of the taming process, not a reflection of the manners of the time.) Shakespeare's own attitude seems to have been that of Beatrice in *Much Ado About Nothing*, when she likens 'wooing, wedding, and repenting' to dance steps: the wooing is 'hot and hasty, like a Scotch jig, and just as fantastical'; Repentance, 'with his bad legs, falls into the cinque-pace faster and faster, till he sink into his grave'; but the wedding is 'mannerly-modest, as a measure, full of state and ancientry'.

The furious Puritans searched diligently, and found a very different scene. In the next century, they were to have even more fuel to stoke their fiery — and extremely articulate — wrath.

CHAPTER FIVE

Years of Social Upheaval
The Seventeenth Century

My wooing's ended; now my wedding's neere;
When gloves are giving, guilded be you there.'

Robert Herrick:
Lines to Rosemary and Baies

The Bride was clad in White . . . & covered also with a white vaile.' John Evelyn saw such a bride in March 1646, when, as a splendidly enquiring twenty-five-year-old doing the Grand Tour, he was taken to a Jewish wedding in Venice. During the rest of his long life, he attended many other marriages, both in England and on the Continent, and he noted them all in his diary, but he never again said what the bride wore. The dress of the young Jewess had obviously struck him as very unusual; and well it might — the same kind of thing was not to be seen at a Christian ceremony for another 150 years.

In Britain, the Elizabethan wedding formula continued with little change right through to the middle of the 17th century; then came the interregnum, Oliver Cromwell, and complete upheaval. Dedicated Puritans did not believe in celebrating anything, and that included marriages. For three years these were taken out of the

churches altogether and matrimony was made a purely civil contract, performed before justices of the peace with the formal sobriety given to any other legal transaction. With the restoration of Charles II in 1660, the old festivities and frivolities returned; but by the end of the century a curious change had taken place, which had nothing to do with the head of state, religion, or the law. It suddenly became fashionable to marry secretly: a special licence, a discreet home-visit from the clergyman, a quiet family dinner and possibly a hand at cards, and the deed was done. '. . . the Wedding is clapp'd up so privately, that People are amaz'd to see Women brought to Bed of legitimate Children, without having ever heard a Word of the Father', wrote a surprised French observer.

All very different from the noisy court weddings which took place under the patronage of James I, the first Stuart king of England, at the beginning of the century. Sir Dudley Carleton, a guest at one of the earliest of these — the marriage of the new king's young favourite, Sir Philip Herbert in 1604 — reported that it was celebrated at Whitehall Palace with great pomp and a handsome marriage feast. 'No ceremony was omitted of Bride-cakes, Points, Garters and Gloves, which have been ever since the livery of the court; and at night there was sewing into the sheet, casting off the bride's left hose, with many other pretty sorcerie.' Many a great lady who emerged from the fray with a handful of points (ribbon garters were called points as soon as they appeared on masculine legs) or a pair of new gloves, found she had lost her jewels or her skirts in the process. The bridal pair slept that night in the palace council chamber and next morning 'the King in his shirt and Nightgown gave them a "*Reveille Matin*" before they were up, and spent a good time in or upon the bed, chuse which you will believe.'

Nine years later, when the king's own eldest daughter, the Princess Elizabeth, married the eighteen-year-old German elector palatinate, there was a little more restraint and considerably more splendour. The great poets

of the day serenaded the match, one of them, Thomas Heywood, writing a vast nuptial song, praising the bride whose very presence paradic'd the place and the groom who, 'Having female beauty in manly looke' was 'for *Venus*, or her sonne mistooke'. He also mentioned 'a bright saffron roab from Hymen borrowed'; but, in fact, the bride's dress was made of 'Florence cloth of silver, richly embroidered' and paid for by a marriage-tax levied on the country as a whole. Getting the people to pay for royal weddings was a traditional right of the crown, just as, for centuries, tenants were legally bound to contribute to the wedding of their lord's eldest daughter and the knighting of his eldest son (a shilling for every £1-worth of land held was the usual sum); but all these customs had fallen out of use. It had been more than a hundred years since the last royal marriage tax, and James's attempt at a revival met with such surly opposition, he wisely decided not to enforce it. Having paid out a hair-raising £53,294 for the festivities and a further £40,000 as the bridal portion, he received only £20,500 from his subjects.

A great deal of the £53,294 went on entertainment: Sir Francis Bacon and Inigo Jones were in charge of this department and, as well as organising lavish court *masques*, they contrived a whole series of magnificent spectacles to set floating on the Thames from 11 February until the 16th (the wedding took place on St. Valentine's day). The highlight of this display was the reconstruction of the Battle of Lepanto, complete with British men o'war, Turkish galleys, and floating castles, forts, rocks and beacons to set the scene. The bride's dress was a minor item compared with all this, but even so, her cloth-of-silver train alone cost £130, and set an expensive fashion for future royal brides to follow. From this time until the beginning of the 19th century (when Queen Victoria chose to be married in white), silver was looked upon as the royal bride's badge of purity.

According to a contemporary account of the wedding (included in John Leland's *Collectanea*) the young Prin-

cess Elizabeth wore upon her head 'a crown of refined golde, made Imperiall by the pearles and diamonds thereupon placed, which were so thicke beset that they stood like shining pinnacles upon her amber-coloured haire dependantly hanging, playted down over her shoulders to her waiste, between every plaight a roll or liste of gold-spangles, pearles, rich stones and diamonds'. She was attended by sixteen bridesmaids — one for each year of her age — all robed in white or silver tissue, trimmed with silver lace and with detachable sleeves of 'several colord tyssues'. (The bride's sleeves were embroidered with diamonds of 'inestimable value'.) Such profligate expense on a court wedding has probably never been repeated in Britain.

What happened to marriages during the Commonwealth has no real place in a book about 'the white wedding', but it was a fascinating period, and like every other slice of history, it has left its mark on the traditions we observe today. It caused an almighty set-back in the evolution of white, and most probably affected the whole pattern of weddings for the next two hundred years. In short, it's worth a detour.

The Puritans did not approve of white wedding dresses, or anything else which smacked of superstition; they believed that marriages should be performed with the minimum of fuss and ceremony, and for the three years after Cromwell was proclaimed Protector, the only legal marriage was one performed before a justice of the peace.

A couple wishing to marry during this time presented all particulars to a parish registrar; they could then choose whether to have the banns called in church on the following three Sundays or in the market place on the following three market days. When the registrar was sure the banns had been cried in one or the other, he issued a certificate to say so. This was then presented to a justice of the peace, who joined the couple's hands, heard them exchange their vows and declared the marriage lawful and complete.

Within the family of the Lord Protector, at least one member preferred the church to the market place when the time came to have her banns called. Frances, Oliver Cromwell's youngest daughter, chose to have her wedding announced in St. Martin's-in-the-Fields, which, to conform with Puritan principles, had been stripped of its saintly connections and become plain Martin's-in-the-Fields, 'a publique meeting-place'. The Cromwells themselves were going up in the world, however. All the Lord Protector's elder children had married within their own social class — the gentry. Now, Frances's husband was the grandson and heir of the Earl of Warwick, and only a few days earlier her sister, Mary, had married Lord Falconbridge.

In 1656, when the justices of the peace were relieved of their marriage monopoly, most weddings returned to the churches — or meeting-houses — but not to the Anglican marriage service. The *Book of Common Prayer* was banned and a new *Directory for Publick Worship,* with a much simplified ceremony, replaced it. Wedding rings were officially frowned on — 'A Relique of Popery and a Diabollicall Circle for the Devil to daunce in' was how one puritan divine saw them — but most people continued to use them and at least one 'officiating minister' (clergymen went out with royalty) saw that his daughter had one 'lest she should be turned back upon him later'.

With one directive the Puritans had more luck, however, and the result is still with us. It was the idea that one should not marry on Sundays. The *Directory for Publick Worship* ordered that no marriage should be solemnised on a day of public humiliation, adding 'And we advise it be not on the Lord's day.' This previously popular wedding day never became fashionable again.

With the death of Oliver Cromwell in 1658 the Commonwealth began to crumble and two years later the way was clear for the return of the Stuarts. That merriest of monarchs, Charles II, was once again restored to his

throne. Wedding feasts and festivities were frowned upon no more, but the dampening effects of nearly a decade of Puritan rule had left their mark. The full-blooded, three- or four-day wedding celebrations, the tournaments and *masques*, the breath-taking extravagance, never fully returned. It was all a little more piece-meal now: often the bridal pair married at one place, had the party at another, and went to a third for the bedding.

When John Evelyn's daughter, Susanna, married in April 1693, he wrote: 'Much of this Weeke spent in Ceremonie, receiving Visites and Entertainments of Relations.' But it was all on a reasonably intimate scale. The custom was no longer for relatives to converge from all parts of the country for the wedding. Instead, it was the bridal pair who did the travelling: a week or so after the ceremony they took off on a grand tour, living with each relation for several weeks and usually staying away for many months. In November 1693, seven months after Susanna's marriage to William Draper, Evelyn noted: 'My Son Draper & Daughter, now with Child, came to see us; after their some monthes absence in Visting their Relations in divers places of the Country &c.'

The King's own wedding was especially restrained. There had been a proxy marriage in Portugal before the twenty-four-year-old Catherine of Braganza set sail for England, and there was another quiet ceremony at Portsmouth when she landed. At this the new queen wore a richly-coloured dress, with wide, lace-trimmed panels of a lighter fabric at either side of the skirt, a matching stomacher, a low-cut lace collar, and large, puffed sleeves, handsomely slashed to show the lighter material beneath. She also wore a farthingale, which was thought to be absurdly old-fashioned by the British. Samuel Pepys, the tailor's son who once signed himself 'Dapper Dick', was particularly scathing, and even the gentler Evelyn commented on the 'Portuguese ladies in their monstrous fardingales' and the curious way the princess had of arranging her hair: 'her foretop long and turned aside

very strangely'. King Charles was thought to be most elegantly dressed for the occasion in the very latest fashion of petticoat breeches, which were tight to the knee and then flounced out in a frill of lace at least a foot deep.

One of the main reason for the subdued wedding celebrations in England was the King's choice of a Catholic for his bride; and the country's displeasure was even more marked a decade later when Charles's brother, James, Duke of York, also married a Catholic — and had the King of France and the Pope to help with the matchmaking. At the age of 26 the Duke (later James II) had secretly married an English girl (Anne Hyde, daughter of the Earl of Clarendon) but when she died twelve years later, he looked abroad for a second wife. Charles II and Queen Catherine still had no children after eleven years of marriage, and the Duke of York had only two daughters; it was important that he should, if possible, produce a male heir to the throne. A careful survey was made of likely princesses, and a short list of eleven drawn up. Of these, the Archduchess Claudia of Innsbruck looked the most promising and the Earl of Peterborough, as proxy for the Duke of York, was dispatched to Austria to marry her, carrying with him £20,000-worth of jewels as a wedding present. But before he reached Innsbruck, the Earl received word that another recent widower, the Holy Roman Emperor, Leopold I, had also decided to marry the Duchess; the Duke of York was now offered her sister. After an indignant retreat, Lord Peterborough was sent off to look at number two on the list, the Duchess of Guise, but she proved to be 'low of stature and ill-shaped'. By a lucky chance, the Duke's envoy now saw a painting of the young sister of the Duke of Modena, who was also on the list, and was so completely captivated by it himself, he set off with eagerness to secure her for his royal master. 'It bore the appearance of a Young Creature about Fourteen years of Age,' he wrote, 'and carried such a light of Beauty, such Characters of Ingenuity and Goodness as surprised the eyes.' But unfortunately, this creature of

delight had decided to become a nun. Sadly, the good Lord Peterborough pressed on to look at the next candidate, the Princess Eleanor of Neuburg, who had 'a neck as white as snow', which was good, but 'was inclined to be fat', which was not. (How these poor girls were surveyed and publicly summed up!) In Wurttemberg, the by now much travelled envoy found the Princess Mary Anne 'possible' but his heart obviously wasn't in it, and when instructions arrived to return to Modena and pursue the young princess there, the Earl leapt into speedy action.

Mary of Modena had been 'so innocently bred' she had heard neither of the Duke of York, nor of England, until the marriage was proposed to her, and her immediate reaction was 'Why *me*?' She received the Earl bewildered but determined not to yield: although 'she was much obliged to the King of England and the Duke of York for their good opinion', she 'could not but wonder why, when there were so many other princesses of more merit, who would esteem the honour, and be willing to embrace it, they should require her, when she had vowed herself, as much as she was able, to another life.' And her sentiments do seem very reasonable. But not to the King of France, the glorious Louis XIV, who wanted to see this alliance with Britain concluded; he now stepped into the bargaining with an offer to guarantee a dowry of 400,000 crowns on the part of the bride; Charles II, on his side, undertook to provide £15,000 a year for his brother; but in the end it was Pope Clement X who won round the truly pious princess, by suggesting she should 'place before her eyes the great profit that might accrue to the Catholic faith' through such a marriage, which would 'open a wider field than the virginal cloister' and be more 'conducive to the service of God and the public good'. With great haste the proxy marriage was arranged so that it could take place on the same day (30 September 1673) that the marriage settlement was signed.

After public rejoicings in Modena, Lord Peterborough set out for England with the new Duchess (in constant

tears and writing long letters back to her convent at every halt). Charles II wanted them home before the next session of Parliament, hoping to forestall the anger of the country with a *fait accompli* and a winning (albeit Catholic) bride. But the harassed Earl could not get his caravan to move more than 20 miles a day, and was not sure how his royal masters would feel about an additional passenger, the mother of the young Princess, who 'could not be diverted from coming by any means'. At Dover, the forty-year-old bridegroom was waiting to greet his fifteen-year-old bride; and she cried again. A second marriage ceremony was quickly performed, 'after a fashion', by the Bishop of Oxford, acting on the sole authority of the King. At Gravesend, Charles II and his courtiers were waiting with the royal barge to conduct the wretched (still crying) bride up the Thames to Whitehall Palace in what should have been a gay little flotilla. Parliament, which had long-since been in session, called on His Majesty to declare the proxy Catholic wedding void; and, as a result, Parliament was adjourned. (And after all this trouble, though the Duke of York and Mary of Modena did have a son — 'The Old Pretender', who in turn fathered 'The Young Pretender', Bonnie Prince Charlie — he never succeeded to the British throne, whilst the two daughters of Anne Hyde, Mary and Anne, both became queen.)

The youth of Mary of Modena caused no comment in an era when many girls married at 12, the lowest legal age. John Evelyn, when nearly 27, married a twelve-year-old and then went off travelling for four years, 'my Wife being yet very Young, and therefore dispensing with a temporarie & kind separation, whilst under the care of an excellent Lady, & prudent Mother'. But not everyone approved. When Sir Stephen Fox, friend to both Evelyn and Pepys and, like the latter, a man who had risen through the ranks, was offered Lord Spencer, son of the Countess of Sunderland, as a husband for his daughter, he said: 'that his Daughter was very Young, as well as my Lord, &

he was fully resolv'd never to marry her, without the parties mutual liking, which she could not judge of 'til more advanc'd in age . . .' His daughter was then about 12 and he thought 16 or 17 the proper time.

At Charles II's quiet wedding, all the ribbons decorating the bridges dress were 'cut in little pieces', and as far as they would go, everyone had some'. A few years later, this decorous method of distributing the bridal trophies became more decorous still and, at all but the most rumbustious affairs, the ribbons, already made up into 'true-love knots', were presented to the guests before the ceremony. Gloves, which were also still much given, were now nearly always white, but the knots of ribbons — or favours, as they were called — were a colourful combination of three or four different shades, chosen by the bride with due thought to the deep significance of each. ('True-blue' was popular, since it stood for religion or constancy, and so was straw colour, for plenty; but gold could imply avarice, and 'popingay green' was to be avoided at all costs since it was said to signify wantonness.

A Frenchman, Monsieur Misson, who kept a sharp eye on the manners of the British this century, was astonished at the large number of favours handed out on each occasion: 'the greatest Noblemen . . . give them not only to those that are at the Wedding, but to five hundred People besides; they send them about, and distribute them at their own Houses'. The gentlemen — from King (if he knew the bridal family) to humblest retainer — wore them in their hats for several days on either side of the event. Although they did not appear at his own marriage, the custom was thought to have been brought to England from France by King Charles II; though M. Misson, who thought they were foolish things, was happy to report that in his own country the giving of favours was 'practis'd now only among Peasants'.

Another wedding item which was thought to have benefited from the French influence introduced by

Charles II — or, in this case, by the French pastrycooks who accompanied him from exile — was the cake. At the beginning of the century, these were small and plain and piled up one on top of the other 'like the picture of the shew-bread in the old Bibles'; but during Charles II's reign they became much more substantial efforts, decorated with marzipan and elaborate icing in much the way we know today. To begin with the icing was put over the mounds of small cakes, so that although they looked like one large, handsomely decorated confection, they could still be broken satisfactorily over the heads of bride and groom: one crack in the outer casing, and out fell a traditional cascade of individual bride-cakes.

Towards the end of the 17th century, marriages themselves underwent a remarkable change. There was a growing sensitivity; a turning away from the bawdy presentation of Mistress Bride to all the world. Now high society, and the people who followed its example, opted for late-night wedding ceremonies in their own drawingrooms or bedchambers, followed perhaps by a few days of festive meals, dancing and pleasure, but all 'without Noise' and within the most intimate family circle. An even quieter alternative was the early morning church wedding, with just two witnesses, closed doors, and a one-guinea tip to the curate to further keep the secret. The one ingredient essential to both, was a special licence.

The bedding ceremony apparently still took place even at these weddings, and at one royal marriage wedding and bedding were given equal importance, and both were equally jolly. It was another union aimed at producing a male Stuart heir (even though the bride's step-mother, the reluctant Mary of Modena, was also currently busy about the same task). Charles II, uncle of both the unwilling bride, Princess Mary (daughter of the Duke of York and his first wife, Anne Hyde), and the weakly bridegroom, Prince William of Orange, gave hearty encouragement both at the altar and at the bedside. According to the

diary of the bride's physician: 'At nine o'clock at night the marriage was solemnised in her highness's bed-chamber. The King, who gave her away, was very pleasant all the while; for he desir'd that the Bishop of London would make haste, lest his sister [*the Duchess of York*] bee delivered of a son, and so the marriage be disappointed; and when the prince endowed her with all his worldly goods, hee willed to put all up in her pockett for 'twas clear gains. At eleven o'clock they went to bed, and his majesty came and drew the curtains and said to the prince 'Now, nephew, to your worke! Hey! St. George for England!'

The belief in the marriage settlement was now greater than ever and a young girl's dowry was often expected to pay off her husband's family debts, or provide a settlement for one of his younger sisters, as well as ensure that the couple themselves could maintain their social station. The bargaining often stretched over months, or even years: while the plague was raging in London, families moved a little further out into the country week by week, carrying on protracted wedding negotiations as they went. This emphasis on finance was, no doubt, one of the main reasons for a less innocent kind of quiet wedding. There were some chapels where it was possible to marry secretly *without* a licence, and the knowledgeable M. Misson explained how they worked:

'Take the two first People you meet, two Beggars if you think fit, carry them along with you to the privileg'd Church as early in the Morning as you please, Mr. Curate will marry them so fast, that neither King nor Parliament can unmarry them; and for two Crowns your Business is dispatched. Hence come the Matches between Footmen and young Ladies of Quality, who you may be sure live no very easy Life together afterwards: Hence too happen polygamies, easily conceal'd, and too much practis'd.'

The 'privileg'd Churches' were St. James's, in Duke's Place, and St. Trinity in the Minories. Both claimed that they did not come under the jurisdiction of the Bishop of

London and could therefore make their own rules. Surprisingly, they got away with this for a good many years, and did brisk matrimonial business from the reign of Charles II until the end of the century. One of the marriage registers of St. James's, Duke's Place, showed that in the twenty-seven years from November 1664, nearly 40,000 weddings took place there — an average of almost 1500 a year. As the incumbent could fix his own fee for a quick no-questions-asked ceremony, it was highly lucrative. Pre-dated certificates were also available, which proved helpful in the case of embarrassingly premature heirs.

Poor people could find the same type of facilities in the less salubrious neighbourhood of the Fleet prison, and towards the end of the 17th century Fleet marriages were becoming notorious. Prisoners with enough money to bribe the warden were allowed to live 'Within the Rules' of the prison but outside its walls. Many a criminal clergyman set himself up in comfortable lodgings in the streets and yards round about and made a handsome living out of weddings at five shillings a time. Shady men of God still at large teamed up with tavern keepers, who provided a wedding parlour — and brandy on the house — in gratitude for the wedding-breakfast business which came their way. None of the marriages was legal (no banns were called, no licence bought) and the only certificate issued, if one were issued at all, was a grubby piece of paper with an illegible signature. Most of the rogue clergymen kept marriage registers to some degree of accuracy, which were frequently produced in court as evidence in bigamy cases. During the last few years of the century, in the reign of William and Mary, a duty was put on marriage licences and certificates, after which both, to be legal, had to carry a five-shilling government stamp. (Under the same Act, bachelors and widowers were taxed, just as advocated by Henry VIII's Cardinal Pole; though the money went not to 'pore damosellys and vyrgynys' but to 'carrying on the War against France with vigour'.) The new stamp duty,

and the introduction of a £100 fine on clergymen caught performing illegal marriages, caused a brief lull in the irregular marriage trade; but it soon got going again, brisker than ever. A couple who had had their hands joined by a clergyman, however disreputable, said their vows and handed over five shillings — or even half a crown and a glass of cheap brandy — *felt* married. Most of them were content with any scrap of paper for their marriage lines and they certainly were not going to pay another five shillings to the government for something that was none of its business.

With all this going on, it is not surprising that we hear little of white weddings. A bride embarking on marriage in such an under-cover way (either legally or illegally) was not going to advertise the fact by sporting virgin white and a wreath of flowers. And a lady of fashion, marrying late at night in her chamber, preferred powdered hair, jewels and a low-cut gown to the charms of sweet simplicity.

However, there was one kind of white wedding which gained a limited following during this century: it was thought that if a girl wore only a single long white garment on her wedding day, her husband could not, in the future, be held accountable for her debts. It was never true, but lingered way into the 18th century, and seems to have been founded on the idea that a husband was only deemed responsible because on marriage he acquired absolute interest in his wife's estate. If, it was argued, the husband gained nothing with his wife, then surely he could not be held to account. Several parish registers of the 16th, 17th and early 18th centuries record weddings where the bride was dressed 'only in her shift and bareheaded'. (In 1774 there was a particularly sad case at Saddleworth where a bride of 70, who was already 'a little in Debt' was 'obliged' by her 30-year-old bridegroom to be 'married in her shift'; but 'the weather being very severe, threw her into such a violent fit of shaking as induced the compassionate Minister to cover her with his

coat'.) A companion piece to this fallacy was the belief that a man could lawfully sell his wife, provided he handed her over with a halter round her neck. This wretched custom lasted even longer.

In the 17th century the bride-ale became the penny-bridal and moved out of the churches and church houses and into the taverns and ale-houses. The young couple struck a bargain with the landlord for a room and food in exchange for the wine, ale, and spirit trade the wedding would bring his way. The guests, once more, paid for their own drinks and made a collection for the bride and groom. Even the more prosperous of the lower classes, who could afford to pay for their own wedding feast, usually held the celebration in a tavern, often ordering a private room for the occasion.

In the country there were still sports on the village green and races run for ribbons supplied by the bride. If the feast were held at some distance from the church, there was a reward for the first guest home after the ceremony. The prize was not much in itself, but provided an excellent excuse for wild behaviour — often in a hard, and dirty, cross-country steeplechase of ten miles or more. In Scotland it was known as 'running for the broose', or 'brose', which was a cup of porridge, and in other northern regions 'riding for the Kail', a cabbage or vegetable soup. In the south, there was 'riding for the bride-cake'.

Only one generalisation can be made — marriages themselves were very popular indeed. Most people married early and married often. At least one widow married again before her weeds were made (she married the 'journeyman woolen-draper' who called to sell her the cloth); and in 1641, John Evelyn was shown the cottage of a woman in Haarlem, Holland, who had been wed 25 times — 'and being now a Widdow, was prohibited to marry for the future; yet it could not be proved, that she had ever made any of her husbands away, though the suspicion had brought her divers times to trouble'.

CHAPTER SIX

Marriage by Stealth
The Eighteenth Century

Weddings are going forward, some wise *some* other wise

Mrs. Delany

Clandestine marriages which had gained favour during the last few years of the 17th century, became an absurd society cult during the 18th; and now another, and a most incongruous, ingredient was added: the bride wore white. To go with her special licence and top-secret ceremony, a bride with any pretension to fashion was dressed from low-cut bosom to pointed toe in white and silver. She also had to be — or, at least appear to be — overcome by the 'awfulness' of the occasion and distressed beyond words at the mere thought of having the banns called publicly in church. If it could be so arranged that the wedding took place in the midst of a whirling house-party, with only the parson and a couple of witnesses in the know, this was very stylish indeed. If the marriage could then be kept secret for several days, or even months, the very pinnacle of *bon ton* was achieved. It is difficult to find the cause for such curious behaviour, unless the pseudo-discreet marriage was a balance to the noisy commercialism of the match-making. Money and marriage had long gone hand in hand, but during this century, they got a wrestler's lock on each other. Heiresses were bar-

tered so openly that their weddings soon came to be called 'Smithfield matches' or 'Smithfield bargains', after the London meat market.

Girls were brought up to know very exactly what they might expect to inherit or have settled on them, and to understand in which precise social and economic strata to look for a husband. 'He has married a fortune' was the phrase of the day, and a girl who was not 'a fortune' stood little chance of making a good match. Dr. Johnson's friend, Mrs. Thrale, wrote a hectic account of her young life, during which her expectations went up and down like a thermometer, according to the humours of a rich uncle. When she was the intended heiress, all eyes turned to the eldest Radcliffe boy of Hitchin Priory, Herts.; when a parson cousin stirred up trouble (or her father behaved foolishly to the man with the money), sights were lowered and a younger brother was considered; in the end, out of favour completely, she was thought lucky to get the handsome Henry Thrale, a man of no family (a brewer, indeed!) but with lots of money of his own and the beautiful Streatham Park in Kent.

Newspaper editors knew it was much more important to give a bride's fortune than her name, and the wedding columns of the *Gentleman's Magazine* were typical of the time, with items such as these:

25th March 1735, 'John Parry, Esq. of Carmarthenshire, to a daughter of Walter Lloyd, Esq., member for that county, a fortune of 8,000l.'

'Sir George C. to the widow Jones, with 10,000l. a-year, besides ready money.'

'The Lord Bishop of St. Asaph to Miss Orell, with 30,000l.'

Many a young heiress resisted this mercenary mating by sighing for a romantic elopement, and quite often by achieving one in the environs of the Fleet Prison. A sur-

prisingly large number of non-eloping, aristocratic bridegrooms also side-stepped the cumbersome business of buying a special licence by patronising the Fleet; and even more popular were the unconsecrated wedding chapels which set up shop in the smarter areas of London. Out at Hampstead, the Sion Chapel offered package deals of wedding-ceremony and wedding-dinner at an all-in price, and discreetly mentioned its fashionable clientele. Marriage licences were said to be necessary, but they were never studied too carefully, if at all. In 1716, it launched an advertising campaign in London newspapers:

Sion Chapel, at Hampstead, being a private and pleasure place, many persons of the best fashion have lately been married there. Now, as a minister is obliged constantly to attend, this is to give notice that all persons bringing a license, and who shall have their wedding-dinner in the garden, may be married in the said Chapel without giving any fee or reward whatsoever, and such as do not keep their wedding dinner at the gardens, only five shillings will be demanded of them for all fees.

In 1753, when George II's Chancellor, Lord Hardwicke, succeeded in getting a sweeping new marriage bill through Parliament, over 90 of these chapels in and around London were forced to close their doors; and deportation instead of fines gradually cleared the Fleet area of 'brandy-nosed' parsons. Lord Hardwicke did not win through without a struggle, however — or without figuring in many a vicious lampoon. The poor saw the bill as depriving them of cheap marriages just to protect a few heiresses, and many of the rich saw nothing wrong with the *status quo*.

Both Houses of Parliament fought furiously before passing the new Marriage Act, defeating some of the clauses and taking the sting out of others. As a result, Scotland escaped the new laws completely (which led to the popularity of Gretna Green), but over the rest of the country everyone except the royal family, 'the people

called Quakers' and 'the persons professing the Jewish religion' had to marry with a special licence or in churches or chapels where 'banns of matrimony had been usually published' and anyone solemnising matrimony without banns or licence in any other kind of establishment, was liable to transportation 'to some of His Majesty's plantations in America for the space of fourteen years'. Destroying, forging or falsifying, with evil intent, an entry in a marriage-register, became a capital offence, and, as a final dividend, binding pre-contracts (the kind of betrothals which were virtually as serious as marriage) were done away with for ever.

There was a considerable pause between the Marriage Act being passed by Parliament and its coming into effect on Lady Day (25 March) 1754, and this, inevitably, was turned into a great irregular-marriage spree. As early as July 1753 the letter-writing Horace Walpole was informing George Montagu that: 'Lady Anne Paulett's daughter is eloped with a country clergyman. The Duchess of Argyle harangues against the Marriage-bill not taking place immediately, and is persuaded that all the girls will go off before next Lady-day.'

That the poor should have wanted cheap weddings, and young heiresses romantic ones, is understandable. But that great families with great fortunes should have happily contrived secret or, at best, unobtrusive alliances for their offspring remains mysterious. These were the people who believed in the solid marriage settlement and the glory of the great match (as opposed to the love match); it is provokingly inconsistent of them not to have wanted to cap their dynastic efforts with a suitably grand celebration. In aristocratic circles, it certainly wasn't stinginess which caused the swing away from gala nuptials, because some of the quietest weddings were given by the most brilliant hostesses, and one of the most furtive ceremonies of all took place while 500 guests were celebrating the bridegroom's 21st birthday in another part of the house, unaware that there was any additional cause

for congratulations. One factor which may have had a bearing on the new vogue, was the growth of sentimentality. What we now think of as a Victorian simper did in fact make its appearance a good fifty years before Victoria was born. In the second half of the 18th century it was thought correct for a bride to be overcome by 'virgin sensibility' and over-awed by the 'awful solemnity' of the occasion.

This was not the climate in which garter-grabbing and stocking-flinging could survive and except in boisterous country areas all these customs now died out. In their place the honeymoon began to emerge and, for the first time, a degree of seclusion was allowed to newly-weds. To begin with they took off the morning after the wedding to spend a few days quietly at the home of close friends; later, some young couples drove away immediately the ceremony was over, leaving relatives and guest to celebrate without them; a few even went to one of their own houses entirely alone: a most startling idea. It was a trend which began with the nobility and filtered down the social scale very slowly, and it was called 'going away'. The word *honeymoon* had been in use as early as the 16th century and before that *honey-month* described the blissful first weeks of marriage, but these were rather low-class words. *Going away* was very genteel.

This early seclusion was usually very brief. Social duty soon called society couples back to town to receive and return the calls of well-wishers, and any girl who had the *entrée* at court, was expected to be presented anew, as a married woman, within a few days of the wedding. Most brides wore white and silver again for their curtsey to the king and queen, though usually not the same white and silver they were married in.

Not every bride wore white, of course, and for those who chose a coloured wedding dress the two most favoured alternatives were yellow and blue, with lilac as a close runner-up. Blue has long been associated with constancy

(most probably because it is the traditional colour of the Virgin's robe) and yellow was the classic colour of Hymen, god of marriage, but whether any of this actually influenced 18th century brides is dubious. About the importance of white and silver, however, there is not a shadow of doubt, as Oliver Goldsmith makes clear in *The Good-Natur'd Man* (1768); while his heroine prepares to elope to Gretna Green, her maid laments: 'I wish you could take the white and silver to be married in. It's the worst luck in the world, in anything but white.' (Inevitably, she knew of a disaster when a bride had worn another colour: 'I knew one Bet Stubbs, of our town, that was married in red; and, as sure as eggs is eggs, the bridegroom and she had a miff before morning.')

Often the bridesmaids, the bride's mother (or even stepmother) and some of the guests were also dressed in white; and, if the guest were a recent bride herself, she often chose to wear her own wedding gown.

It was an odd situation: this surreptitious attitude to marriage, and yet everyone dressing up in white. The idea of wedding favours seems even more incongruous, yet they were still given, even at the quietest affairs. By the end of the century, these too were white, coloured ribbons being used only by what an 18th century commentator would have unflinchingly called 'the vulgar'.

The veil, most tell-tale of all bridal gear today, was not worn at all during the 18th century; and the garland of flowers was replaced, at both private and public weddings, by caps, bonnets or hats, all usually trimmed with lace (the variety known as *blonde* was the most favoured). At several times hair-styles rose to such absurd heights that any ardent follower of fashion could place nothing on top of them but trimmings — though there was plenty of room for these. In the 1770s, the cartoonists had tremendous fun with milliners climbing ladders to add the final touches to their creations and clients wedged tight into doorways, trapped by the outrageously decorated moun-

tains balanced on their heads. Beaulard, a French milliner, became a national hero by inventing *bonnets à la bonne mamman*, which could be lowered to present a reasonable 'head' to a disapproving mother, or instantly raised to a fashionable three-feet when out of her sight. These were also a boon in carriages and sedan chairs where most women had to kneel or sit with their faces in their laps to accommodate the mounds of false-hair, horse-hair, wool, glue, feathers, ribbon and gauze.

In this age of stealthy weddings, first prize for the most secret of them all goes to a royal bridegroom. In 1766, King George III's brother, the 24-year-old Duke of Gloucester, married an illegitimate niece of Horace Walpole in her Pall Mall drawing room, with no witnesses at all — except her own domestic chaplain, who performed the marriage and then, with considerable tact, died shortly afterwards. As Lord Hardwicke's Act had not covered royal unions, the marriage was eventually allowed to be legal (just in time to make the first child born of it legitimate). Another royal brother, the Duke of Cumberland, announced, at about the same time, that he too was secretly married, and his union was also reluctantly recognised by the King. When the *furore* died down, the Royal Marriage Act was drawn up, making it illegal for any member of the royal family to marry in the future without the prior consent of the sovereign. (Only the approval of both Houses of Parliament could over-rule a royal negative, and then only if the petitioner were over 25.)

Apart from clandestine efforts such as these, Hanoverian weddings were kept with commendable style, though, after the first one, which was celebrated with extraordinary pomp, even these more orthodox occasions were family rather than public events. None of Queen Anne's seventeen children lived to marriageable age, and when she, the last of the Stuarts, died without an heir in 1714, it was her third cousin, the 54-year-old Elector of Hanover, who became king (George I) of England, in-

heriting through his grandmother, the little Princess Elizabeth (daughter of James I) whose wedding in 1613 had been carried out with such fairy-tale extravagance. The new king had been married in Hanover in 1682, divorced his wife for infidelity twelve years later, and brought only mistresses with him to England. His dapper little son, the future George II, also married in Germany; so it was not until his children reached marrying age that Britain had her first taste of royal wedding excitement for over fifty years. And then, it was unusually worth waiting for. George II's eldest daughter, Anne, the Princess Royal, was the first to make it to a British altar and she did so amidst celebrations which were patterned on none other than the extravaganza which had launched James I's daughter on married life 120 years before. This time, however, neither bride nor groom were quite the stuff of which story-book romance is made. The Princess was short, fat, 25 and badly marked by the smallpox; and her husband-to-be, the Prince of Orange, was uncharitably called 'a monster' by British courtiers. (The Princess had been told she could refuse the Prince if she wished, but said she would marry him if he were a baboon. 'Well then,' answered the King, 'there is baboon enough for you.')

The marriage took place in the small French Chapel in the grounds of St. James's Palace, and a vast wooden gallery (said to be large enough to hold 4000 spectators) was constructed to link the two buildings. The old Duchess of Marlborough, favourite of Queen Anne and no great friend of the Hanoverians, called it the King's 'orange chest'. Tickets for the spectacle were allocated to dignitaries such as the Lord Mayor of London (who received 300), which brought another fine snort of disapproval from the Duchess about the 'sturdy beggars' they would go to.

For royal brides there was still no 'going away'. On the evening following this wedding the Prince of Orange and his Princess were on show again at a court 'drawing-

room', accepting the good wishes of all who had the *entrée*. The bride's dress on this occasion was, according to another 18th century letter-writer, Mrs. Delany, 'the prettiest thing that ever was seen — a *corps de robe*, that is, in *plain English*, a stiff-bodied gown . . . white damask, with the finest embroidery of rich embossed gold and festoons of flowers intermixed in their natural colours. On one side of her head she had a green diamond of vast size, the shape of a pear, and two pearls prodigiously large that were fastened to wires and hung loose upon her hair: on the other side small diamonds prettily disposed; her earrings, necklace, and bars to her stays all extravagantly fine, presents of the Prince of Orange to her.' The bridesmaids, 'the eight peers' daughters' who held up her train, 'were in the same new style of gown: all white and silver, with great quantities of jewels in their hair, and long locks: some of them were very pretty and well shaped — it is a most becoming dress'. The bridegroom was in 'gold stuff embroidered with silver' which 'looked very rich but not showy'.

Three years later, when the Princess's brother, Frederick, Prince of Wales, married Princess Augusta of Saxe-Gotha, Mrs. Delany told Dean Swift: 'Monstrous preparations are making for the royal wedding. Pearl, gold and silver, embroidered on gold and silver tissues.' But never again in this century were the preparations to be quite as 'monstrous' as those for the Princess Royal. Future Hanoverian brides and bridegrooms married in the Chapel Royal, within St. James's Palace (no more wooden orange boxes); court society was present both for the evening ceremony and for the drawing-room next day, but the great state fanfare was not repeated. The public could watch the arrival of the foreign bride or bridegroom into the city, after that they had to rely on the newspapers; the main ceremony took place behind high palace walls, witnessed only by the privileged 'family' of the court. (Royal marriages reflected one more social trend: brides and

bridegrooms were getting older. Many royal brides were over 25 and most of their husbands were over 30; slightly lower down the social scale, 18 was considered to be a good marrying age for girls and the middle-to-late-twenties for the men. Twelve-year-old brides had gone out of fashion.)

One of the most written about royal weddings of the 18th century was that of George III and the young Princess Charlotte of Mecklenburg-Strelitz — and Horace Walpole did most of the writing. George III was only 22 when he came to the throne (his father, Frederick, Prince of Wales, had died ten years earlier, and so he succeeded his grandfather, George II). After two stolid, Hanover-loving monarchs, the young King appeared to be most promising: 'This Sovereign don't stand in one spot, with his eyes fixed royally on the ground, and dropping bits of German news; he walks about and speaks to everybody', wrote Walpole approvingly after attending one of the new King's first *levées*. He was thought to have 'extreme good-nature' and 'great grace to temper much dignity'. He also had a hopeful eye on Lady Sarah Lennox, daughter of the Duke of Richmond; but, less than a year after his accession, his strong-minded mother saw him firmly tied to a German princess. The lovely Lady Sarah became a bridesmaid.

Wedding fever attacked everyone. 'Mr. Pitt himself would be mobbed if he talked of anything but clothes, and diamonds, and bridemaids', said Walpole. On the wedding day itself, he reported that the new queen's 'tiara of diamonds was very pretty', her stomacher 'worth three score thousand pounds', and 'her violet-velvet mantle and ermine so heavy, that the spectators knew as much of her upper half as the King himself.'

The Duchess of Northumberland, casting a woman's eye over the young princess's outfit, came up with other details: beneath that dragging velvet mantle was a 'silver Tissue stiffen body'd Gown, embroidered and trimmed

with Silver, on her head a little cap of purple Velvet quite covered with Diamonds, a Diamond Aigrette in Form of a Crown, 3 dropt Diamond Ear Rings, Diamond Necklace, Diamond Sprigs of Flowers on her Sleeves and to clasp back her Robe a Diamond Stomacher'. The mantle itself (which Walpole called 'violet' and the Duchess 'purple') was 'laced with Gold and lined with Ermine'.

Although this was not a royal love-match, it worked out very well indeed. After a century of predatory monarchs and royal mistresses, cosy domesticity now became the scene. Even the censorious diarist, Fanny Burney, could find nothing to complain of during her five years' attendance on the Queen — except the dullness of court life (and the fact that she was expected to do some work). George III and Queen Charlotte applied themselves most successfully to the task of filling the royal nurseries with princesses and princes (fifteen of them in all) and to ensuring them a happy family upbringing. But, when the time came for this next generation to start thinking about marriage, few of them were inclined to follow their parents' excellent example. Their eldest son, the glorious 'Prinny', Prince of Wales, who was later to become Prince Regent and King George IV, began his rackety career at 18 by having an affair with an actress. At 20 he secretly married the widowed Mrs. Fitzherbert. As she was a Roman Catholic, this should have forfeited him the throne (the king, as Defender of the Faith, has to marry a member of that faith), but the Royal Marriage Act, instigated by George III when his brothers kept marrying unsuitably, made the union illegal. The permission of the Sovereign had neither been asked for nor given. (In the eyes of the Catholic church, however, the marriage held good, and when the Prince decided to resume the liaison, after his disastrous state marriage to Caroline of Brunswick, he did so 'with the pope's consent'.) Most of the Prince's brothers also preferred mistresses to royal brides, and even his sisters showed no great urge to rush to the altar. In December 1797, when the eldest daughter of George III, the Prin-

cess Royal, was finally married (to Prince Frederick of Wurttemberg) she was a rather mature bride of 31. Nevertheless, her loving mother set about sewing the wedding dress with her own hands, and made much of the *trousseau*, too. Fanny Burney, who long after resigning her post as Assistant Mistress of the Robes, was allowed one visit to court a year, to pay her duty to the queen, made her 1797 excursion in good time to hear all about the recent nuptials. First of all she spoke to the bride's sister the Princess Augusta '. . . when I told her I had heard that her Royal Highness the bride had never looked so lovely she confirmed the praise warmly, but laughingly added: " 'Twas the Queen dressed her! You know what a figure she used to make of herself, with her odd manner of dressing herself; but mamma said: 'Now really, Princess Royal, this one time is the last, and I cannot suffer you to make such a quiz of yourself; so I will really have you dressed properly.' And indeed the Queen was quite in the right, for everybody said she had never looked so well in her life." '

The Queen herself told Miss Burney that 'she had worked her wedding garment, and entirely, and the real labour it had proved, from her steadiness to have no help, well knowing that three stitches done by any other would make it immediately said it was none of it by herself. "As the bride of a widower," she continued, "I know she ought to be in white and gold; but as the King's eldest daughter she had a right to white and silver, which she preferred." '

Royal betrothals don't appear to have existed in Britain during this century: in most cases, a match was decided upon, a settlement worked out, and a proxy marriage arranged, all within months; then the main wedding ceremony took place within hours of the bride's arrival in her new country. Child betrothals had gone right out of fashion and the policy of using royal marriages to cement political ties was waning: only good Protestant German,

Dutch or Danish spouses were thought suitable for Hanoverian brides and bridegrooms. Even with less exalted unions, the pause between making the match and celebrating the marriage was now very brief. Once the papers had been signed, there was rarely more than a month before the wedding.

Most people found no necessity either for bride and groom to become too well acquainted before the ceremony.

At many weddings the cake was still broken over the bride's head and occasionally the very old biscuit (which began to disappear in Elizabethan times) is still mentioned. Giving evidence in a bigamy trial at the Old Bailey in 1731, one Samuel Pickering testified that the accused had certainly been married at his tavern by a Fleet parson because he had seen the ring put on her finger and the biscuit broken over her head.

There was now a newer game to play with the cake, too: unmarried guests thread small pieces of it through the bride's wedding ring, then slept with it under their pillows. Dreams of future marriage partners were pretty well guaranteed. The superstition that removing a wedding ring brings bad luck (which is said to be very ancient) obviously wasn't taken too seriously at this time, for, with the ring still on the finger, the operation is extremely messy, if not impossible. It was almost certainly this cake-threading custom which led to the millions of little white boxes of wedding cake which go out each year to the millions of friends and relations who couldn't be there on The Day. A verse in the *Progress of Matrimony*, 1733, indicates how it started:

> But, madam, as a present take
> This little paper of bride-cake;
> Fast any Friday in the year,
> When Venus mounts the starry sphere,
> Thrust this at night in pillowbeer;
> In morning slumber you will seem
> T' enjoy your lover in a dream.

Now we just eat it: not half as much fun!

For many a bride the greatest ordeal came the Sunday after the wedding when, with her bridesmaids and family — all dressed up in their wedding finery once more — she appeared before the church congregation for the first time and met the scrutiny of several hundred pairs of deeply inquisitive eyes. Describing how this custom was kept in North Wales, Thomas Pennant said the wedding party made the 'most splendid appearance, disturb the church, and strive who shall place the bride and groom in the most honourable seat. After the service is over, the men, with fiddlers before them, go into all the ale-houses in the town.'

After the marriage of Jacob Houblon, a Berkshire squire, in 1770, the family party also dressed up in their wedding clothes (both bride and groom wore white and silver) for the first visit to their nearest town, and again, one month later, for the first assembly-room ball of the season. Everywhere they went the church bells were 'immediately set a ringing, & the doors and windows in every street were crowded with spectators.'

How much easier to face a dining-room full of strangers in a honeymoon hotel, and pretend you don't look like a honeymooner, than to run the gauntlet like this with friends and neighbours who already know so much about you and are now avid to surmise the rest.

Touring Scotland in 1769, Pennant found odd wedding customs there, too. 'The courtship of the Highlander has these remarkable circumstances attending it: after privately obtaining the consent of the Fair he formally demands her of her father. The lover and his friends assemble on a hill allotted for that purpose in every parish and one of them is dispatched to obtain permission to wait on the daughter: if he is successful he is again sent to invite the father and his friends to ascend the hill and partake of a whisky cask, which is never forgot: the lover advances, takes his future Father-in-law by the hand, and then plights his troth, and the fair one is then surrendered

up to him.' During the wedding ceremony, great care was taken that dogs should not pass between the bride and groom and particular attention was paid to leaving the bridegroom's left shoe without 'a buckle or latchet to prevent witches "from depriving him, on the nuptial night, of the power of loosening the virgin zone" '. In the Western Highlands, he discovered a custom which was just beginning to die out: 'The morning after the wedding: a basket was fastened with a cord round the neck of the bridegroom by the female part of the company, who immediately filled it with stones, till the poor man was in great danger of being strangled, if his bride did not take compassion on him, and cut the cord with a knife given to her to use at discretion. But such was the tenderness of the Caledonian Spouses, that never was an instance of their neglecting an immediate relief of their good man.'

In Scotland, Wales, Cumberland and some other country districts penny-weddings were still held, though these were now becoming rare in the south of England. In Wales they were called bidden-weddings or bridal-biddings and the guests were often 'bidden' to the festivities by a 'herald, with a crook or wand adorned with ribbons'.

According to a Welsh contributor to the *Gentleman's Magazine* in May 1784, such biddings were frequently held when 'servants, trades-folks, and little farmers' married. He described the gifts ('from a cow or a calf down to half-a-crown or a shilling') as being given at an 'entertainment', provided some time before the wedding, and said he had frequently known of £50 being collected, and had heard 'of a bidding which produced even a hundred, to a couple who were much beloved by their neighbours; and thereby enabled to begin the world with comfort'. Careful note was kept of all gifts received (sometimes they were even entered in the parish register) so that the bridal pair could 'retaliate' in an appropriate manner when they

were bidden in their turn to the festivities of their benefactors.

And now, finally, a trip to Gretna Green: the most romantic and lasting legacy of the 18th century. Lovers no longer gain any worth-while benefit by heading for this small border village, but they still run there, from all over the world, when parents say 'No'. It all began with Lord Hardwicke's Marriage Act and the uproar in parliament which allowed Scotland to escape the stringent marriage laws which came into effect in England and Wales. To start with, eloping lovers fled to the Channel Islands and the Isle of Man, but the price (five guineas per couple) and the misery of what could sometimes be two or three days on a stormy crossing from Southampton to St. Peter Port, Guernsey, soon ruled out the former. The Isle of Man tackled the problem itself by bringing in new laws which included the threat that anyone caught solemnising a lawless marriage would be pilloried, lose his ears and be imprisoned until the governor saw fit to release him, on payment of a fine not exceeding fifty pounds.

And so Scotland came into favour. Edinburgh's Canongate area was first to gain a reputation for quick marriages and was soon swarming with a very disreputable mob of phoney parsons (unlike the Fleet clergy, these were not even de-frocked or badly-behaved priests, but usually lawyers' clerks or out-of-work servants). Soon logic stepped in: Edinburgh was eighty miles and more over the Scottish border, and for runaway lovers with a pack of irate relatives on their heels, every mile was a threat to future happiness; marrying in a town on the border itself made more sense; and so came the popularity of little Gretna Green, right on the dividing line, and just nine miles from the last English posting-stage, and fresh horses, of Carlisle.

The popular idea that the Gretna Green 'coupler' was a blacksmith seems to have been pure myth, which an official report in the *Statistical Account of Scotland* tried

to explode as early as the 1790s. The 'greatest part of the trade' at that time, said the report was monopolised by 'a man who was originally a tobacconist, and not a blacksmith, as is generally believed'. His predecessor had been a soldier, and none of his successors was to be a blacksmith, but the desire to turn them all into men of the forge was unassailable.

The myth is thought to have begun with some high-flown literary reference to a Scottish Vulcan riveting the hymeneal chains of matrimony, but whatever the origin, it met with most enthusiastic support, as a wealth of delightful Victorian prints still show.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Marriage by Fascination
The Nineteenth Century

In a glimmer of gems and a sheen of white,
With the orange wreath on her snowy brow.

The Bride Flown

The great white wedding: a church crowded with friends and relatives; the bridegroom waiting at the altar; the blushing bride in veil and orange blossom: Wagner and Mendelssohn; bridesmaids and best man; wedding cake, and wedding breakfast; showers or rice and old shoes; all the superstitions in the repertory; and a proper honeymoon, just for two. This was when it all happened, when all the jig-saw pieces which make the young girl's golden dream (and her mother's fixed determination) came together to form the great white wedding tradition. Many of the ingredients had been around for centuries, as we have seen, but it was now that they took the precise shape we know today and were called by the names we call them. During the 19th century, *bride-cake* gradually became *wedding cake*; *Bride-maids,* bridesmaids; *Bride-men*, turned first into *groomsmen* and then, finally, the *best man* of all appeared. *Going away* became the *bridal*

tour (and stopped there for the very aristocratic), then, almost universally, was accepted as the honeymoon, with *honeymoon hotels* to cater for the trade. Wedding music meant Wagner's *Bridal Chorus*, from *Lohengrin* ('Here comes the Bride!') and Mendelssohn's *Wedding March* from *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Wedding hymns were sung (services became 'fully choral'), churches were banked with flowers, parsons directed sentimental words to sentimental congregations, and healths were drunk in champagne at 'a dinner called a breakfast'. Marrying for love was now a hope, if not always an expectation.

In short, weddings became a romantic blend of religious pomp and secular splendour which gladdened Victorian hearts. Or *some* Victorian hearts, for religion was still a red-hot issue and the Protestant-Catholic contest continued to smoulder dangerously. Parliament ended legal discrimination against Catholics at the beginning of the century, with the Catholic Emancipation Act of 1829, which made them first-class citizens once more with, in theory at any rate, all the rights and opportunities of Protestants; and the new Marriage Act of 1836, which introduced civil registrars, no longer required that Catholics should be married at an Anglican ceremony; but there were still squeals of 'papal aggression' from the country when the Pope set up territorial bishops in England in 1850, and many Protestants looked upon the idea of dressing up their own churches and filling them with music and singing, as one more slippery step towards incense and Rome.

The Scots were particularly disapproving and one of them, Jane Welsh Carlyle, wrote an amusing account of her first experience of the new-style marriages. Her own wedding, to that pillar of Victorian letters, Thomas Carlyle, had involved a no-nonsense ceremony in her grandfather's Scottish home, and it was not until 1862, when she was 61 and rather frail, that she first witnessed a London church spectacular. Soon afterwards she wrote to a friend:

. . . the wedding was an immense affair! It was my doctor's little daughter, who was being married, after a three years' engagement, and as soon as she was engaged, she had made me promise to attend her wedding. I had rather wished to see a marriage performed in a church with all the forms, the eight bridesmaids &c. &c. but I had renounced all idea of going to the church for fear of being laid up with a fresh cold, and meant to attend only the breakfast party after, in which I took less interest. But imagine how good the people here are to me. Our rector, in whose church (St. Lukes) the marriage was to take place, being told by his wife I wished to go, but durstn't for fear of the coldness of the church, ordered the fires to be kept up from Sunday over into Tuesday morning! Besides a rousing fire in the vestry, where I sat at my ease until the moment the ceremony began! I was much pressed afterwards to acknowledge how superior the English way of marrying was to the Scotch, and asked how I had liked it. I said my feelings were very mixed. 'Mixed?' the rector asked, 'Mixed of what?' 'Well,' I said, 'it looked to me something betwixt a religious ceremony and a — pantomime!' So it is. There were forty-four people at the breakfast.

Pantomine or not, almost from the beginning of the century, this was how most people now wished to marry. The introduction of registry office weddings emphasised that the State regarded marriage as a purely civil contract, but it also, as John Cordy Jeaffreson pointed out (in *Brides and Bridals*), 'concurs with popular feeling in encouraging our brides to think that marriage should be beautiful and hallowed with religious observances. Prevailing opinion may be said to hold that, though matrimony may be *lawful*, it can scarcely be called *holy* unless it has received the sanction of spiritual authority.'

And 'spiritual authority' now meant a great deal more than a cursory joining of hands in a Pall Mall drawing-room. Sales of special licences plummeted. Banns were back in vogue, as a fitting prelude to the pomp of the wedding day (and suddenly no one seems to have minded hearing themselves called spinster any more). In many

rural churches the cry of 'God speed them well' was added to each reading, and the congregation replied with a fervent 'Amen'.

The nation was turning away from the cynicism of the 18th century, and glowing all over with romanticism instead.

In France 'Marriage by fascination', as one Victorian writer termed the new love matches, was still not in vogue. Towards the end of the century, Matilda Betham Edwards, an Englishwoman who had spent much of her life on the other side of the Channel, described French attitudes to mating and marrying in her book *Home Life in France*, and in doing so, obliquely threw a good deal of light on British customs. Many of the French traditions and beliefs which struck Miss Betham Edwards as odd, or at any rate 'foreign', were the customs and beliefs of England during the previous century; but, from her reaction to them, it is obvious that they had not only vanished, but been completely forgotten, in perfidious Albion.

In France the marriage settlement was still of primary importance. Wedlock, there, she said, was 'no mere individual, but a family matter, a kind of joint-stock affair. An Englishman marries a wife. A Frenchman takes not only his bride for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, but her entire kith and kin . . . For centuries, alike in the humblest as well as the highest ranks, matrimonial settlements have kept family possessions together in France — and enriched village notaries! . . . outside Bohemia, slumland, or the world of the *déclassé*, portionless brides in France are an anomaly. No matter what her rank or condition, a girl brings her husband something.'

Until the middle of the 19th century, this was true in Britain, too. Charlotte Bronte's Jane Eyre, newly engaged to the falcon-eyed Mr. Rochester, was delighted to hear that an uncle was thinking of making her his modest heiress: 'It would, indeed be a relief,' she thought, 'if I

had ever so small an independency ... if I had but a prospect of one day bringing Mr. Rochester an accession of fortune, I could better endure to be kept by him now.' It sounds curiously Women's Lib. (though it is hardly the kind of cause modern women's libbers fight over). Brainwashed as we are into thinking that no one had given a thought to women's rights (other than the right to vote) until the present army of noisy militants came on the scene, it is easy to forget that women were changing the pattern of their lives just as dramatically a hundred years ago. And, as usually happens, there were those who delighted in abusing rather than using any new release from restraint. This showed itself especially in the attitude to betrothals, which were no longer blessed by the church nor legally binding, and were called engagements. By 1872, John Cordy Jeaffreson could write: 'Every street in modern London is inhabited by a husband who, without cherishing any unfriendliness to his wife's early admirers, is aware that, before becoming his conjugal partner, she was engaged successively to two or three men of his acquaintance, each of whom she in turn threw over without his consent.' The Victorian miss, he said, 'enjoys greater liberty than the maiden of former time. She may retract any number of lightly given matrimonial promises; and after promising herself with interchangement of rings and holy close of lips to half-a-dozen different suitors, she may become the wife of a seventh admirer, and ask her six jilted lovers to be spectators of her wedding.' There was, however, one drawback to the new rules of the game, for: 'if she has greater freedom she has less security. The law that allows her to trifle with the bevy of lovers, also permits men to jilt her. And it sometimes happens that the frivolous beauty, after playing falsely and cruelly with a true man's passion, receives appropriate, though terrible punishment from a masculine trifler, who wins her love only to show his disdain of it.'

Such hideous revenge was, happily, not the lot of most young girls, who flirted only a little and not too unkindly

before settling down to a long engagement with the man they eventually married. In the 18th century, men had entered into marriage negotiations when they could afford to, and not before. The Victorians were more inclined to promise themselves romantically and wait for better times. Charles Dickens, at the age of 24, was all set for a long engagement to Catherine Hogarth when the success of his first book, *Sketches by Boz*, changed the situation. In March, 1836, he wrote to his uncle:

The great success of my book and the name it has established for me among the Publishers, enables me to settle at an earlier period than I at first supposed possible; I have therefore fixed Saturday next, for my marriage with Miss Hogarth.

The wedding was unfashionably discreet — 'altogether a very quiet piece of business', according to Dickens' friend Thomas Beard. The author's brother-in-law, Henry Burnett, described Miss Hogarth as 'a bright, pleasant bride, dressed in the simplest and neatest manner', looking 'better perhaps than if she had been enabled to aim at something more'. (Dickens had sold the copyright of *Sketches by Boz* outright for £150, which makes the quietness of the wedding less surprising than the fact that he now felt able to 'settle' at all.)

Lengthy engagements meant that brides were rather more mature. The legal ages for marriage were still 12 for girls and 14 for boys, but, said Jeafferson: 'very early marriages have fallen altogether out of practice, and brides of thirty years are thought to marry none too late. . . . any parents in our prosperous ranks, who should now-a-days couple in wedlock a bride and groom of those tender years, would outrage society, and run some risk of being declared by a lunacy-commission incapable of managing their own affairs.'

Preparing the *trousseau*, was now something which could be spread over months or years, rather than weeks, and as

a consequence these grew to alarming proportions. A dozen of everything was the rule of the day.

For the bride herself — and her mother — it was a delightful experience. Whenever a marriage is mentioned in Victorian correspondence or diaries, the very next thing we hear of is a constant flow of visitors — all the friends of the bride and all the friends of her mother — calling round 'to discuss the *trousseau*'.

For the wedding dress white remained the established rule (and the exceptions to it were few); but the 19th century bride was a far more demure 'vision in white' than her 18th century predecessor. A great deal of jewellery was still worn, though silver trimmings soon disappeared and white satin and lace replaced the glittering brocades and silver muslins of the 1700s. The bridal veil made a come-back, not as a conscious revival of Roman wedding veils, but as part of the general trend towards classical fashions. Soon after the French Revolution, the Duchesse d'Abrantès wrote that every dress possessed something 'Turkish, Greek, Mediaeval, or Roman, in short a little of everything except good French taste'. Out of this international rag-bag, the Greek and Roman influence was by far the strongest and the most durable. Throughout the Directoire period in France and the Regency in England, women dressed in clinging, high-waisted gowns (more often white than not) which were quite obviously descended from the classical draperies of ancient Greece and Italy (and very often they damped them down to make them cling the more). As they bound their hair with Roman fillets and wound it into Grecian buns, the best-dressed women of the turn of the century added a trailing scarf of lace or gauze, pinning it centrally to the back of the head, and winding the long ends loosely round otherwise bare arms. Many years after the return to whale-bone and laces, nipped-in waists and massive skirts, Grecian hair-styles and floating veils remained. (And often, as late as the 1830s, fashion magazines still referred to bridal veils as 'scarves', since this is what they

had started life as.) Throughout the rest of the century, small veils were virtually obligatory for older women appearing at court functions, and many, married and unmarried, young and old, wore them for all full-dress occasions. At Queen Victoria's wedding, her mother, the Duchess of Kent, and her aunt, the Dowager Queen Adelaide, both wore veils as well as the bride, and at some marriages all the bridesmaids wore them, too.

To begin with, for weddings as for other occasions, veils were for decoration only: they were pinned to the top, or more often to the back of the head, and trailed down behind the bride, sometimes to within an inch or so of the hem of her gown, sometimes not so far. The fashion for wearing them over the face — thus providing once again a modest shield for maidenly blushes, did not evolve until the 1860s and '70s; and the custom of arriving at the church veil demurely down, and leaving triumphantly bare-faced, was an even later refinement. At first, once the veil was in place, it tended to stay there until the bride got around to eating something at the breakfast, and there is still many an early wedding photograph in existence which shows everyone beaming clear-eyed and gleaming-toothed at the photographer as they leave the church, except the bride, who can only dimly be seen through a haze of lace or tulle.

Royal brides have never been allowed the privilege of hiding behind their wedding veils — and they are still denied it today. There is a tradition that this royal ban was introduced as a precaution against the surprise appearance of substitute brides, but it is more likely to have originated with the first royal wedding veil — Queen Victoria's, which was a small affair even for the 1840s — and with the insatiable desire of the British subject to be allowed free scrutiny of all royal faces on all royal occasions. (A desire which also put an embargo on wide-brimmed hats for the royal family, until Princess Anne over-rode it so throughly, and so stylishly, a few years ago.)

At the beginning of the century there is an occasional

description of a bride with a veil 'hanging all over her', but this does not necessarily mean over the face. During the 1830s and '40s the fashion was definitely for something much smaller, and bridal plates in journals such as *The Ladies Cabinet* and the *World of Fashion* all show complicated hair-styles with ringlets at the side and buns on top, sprinkled about with sprigs of flowers and leaves, the veils attached either centrally behind the bun, or at either side behind the ears. Most veils were made of lace, and usually of the most expensive lace the bride's family could afford (Brussels and Honiton produced the most costly and most coveted: Valenciennes and Alençon came next; English point lace and Mechlin from Belgium were popular; and our old friend blonde was resorted to by the not so well off). The prickly Jane Eyre prepared a 'square of unembroidered blond to wear on her 'low born head' on her wedding day, while Mr. Rochester, with 'princely extravagance' sent to London for lace at least as valuable as the jewels she would not allow him to buy her. This gift was to meet with a nasty end at the hands of the first Mrs. Rochester, the mad-woman with rolling red eyes, who draped it over her own purple and swollen countenance, then tore it in two and trampled on it. But most of these hand-made treasures, which cost several hundred pounds, were treated with due reverence: they either became family heirlooms, worn by several generations of brides, or were worn again by the original bride on special occasions in later life. Queen Victoria's wedding lace was often to appear in sadder years over her widow's black: she wore both her veil and the lace from her wedding dress at the marriages of two of her own children, and at that of her grandson, the future King George V; and in 1897 — fifty-seven years after her wedding day — she again donned both for her official Diamond Jubilee photographs.

Humble brides who married humble bridegrooms usually wore a bonnet rather than a veil (Bethnal Green Museum, London, has a charming example from

1845 — a very chaste affair of white tulle, with a band of orange blossom). The poked brims gave excellent cover from prying eyes but even so, they were often reinforced with a 'fall' of lace or net, which hung over the brim and over the face. This was a general fashion of the time (like hats with veils which have been in and out of favour many times this century). More specifically bridal was a combination of 'bonnet and veil'; in this case, lace or tulle was either draped over the entire bonnet, or attached to the crown and allowed to hang down behind like a large and exotic streamer. The first bride in a country district to announce that she was going to swop her bonnet for a veil proper was sure to cause such a splendid ripple of anticipation that even a *blasé* young parson could be made aware of her enterprise. The Reverend Benjamin Armstrong, 36-year-old vicar of East Dereham, Norfolk, vowed that all weddings were the same and he preferred a funeral any day, yet on February 7, 1854, he wrote in his diary (*Armstrong's Norfolk Diary*): 'A day of excitement in the parish in consequence of Miss Dingle's wedding and her wearing a *veil*, supposed to be the first ever seen in Dereham. The church was crowded. All weddings are alike. The mind reverts to new wellfitting gloves and bouquets imported from Covent Garden — postboys with huge favours and smirking servant girls — a handsome breakfast with lots of champagne — wretched speeches on the part of the men and tears on the part of the women. Then come the corded boxes; the bridegroom has another glass, an old shoe is thrown into the carriage for luck and off they go. For my part I dislike weddings and would sooner attend a funeral.'

Fashion magazines of the early 1820s make no mention of orange-blossom, but in the June 1827 edition of *La Belle Assemblée* a passage from a moving tale entitled *The Bridal Morn* indicates that it was, by then, an accepted piece of British wedding regalia; 'In silence were adjusted the white garments — the wreath of orange flowers — the bridal veil, scarcely whiter than the cheek it shaded.'

Floral headdresses had made a general fashion comeback several years earlier, these natural blooms and garlands suiting the simple styles and floating muslins of the day, and sitting well on the curls, ringlets and Grecian buns as they would not have done on the Pompadours and monstrous *coiffeurs* of the previous century. To begin with the rose, that old favourite, the flower of Venus, was most in demand, and myrtle (another symbol of love) was also brought back into harness. Princess Charlotte of Wales (only child of the disastrous union between the Prince Regent and Caroline of Brunswick) wore a wreath of roses on her upswept red-gold hair when she married Prince Leopold of Saxe-Coburg in May 1816, while two of her old-fashioned aunts (both daughters of George III), who became somewhat aged brides around the same time, chose the more lasting adornments of diamonds and feathers: the 40-year-old Princess Mary married the Duke of Gloucester in July 1816 in a wreath of diamonds; while her sister, the Princess Elizabeth, who, two years later, finally clasped a German prince to her bosom at the age of 46, did so in a diamond bandeau surmounted by ostrich plumes.

By the time Queen Victoria married her 'fascinating' Albert in February 1840, orange blossom had, however, triumphed over all rivals, and the young Queen acknowledged the fact by wearing it in a substantial wreath, undiluted by jewels, feathers, or any other bloom. The Spanish Countess Eugénie de Montijo, whose elegance Queen Victoria much admired, was not so abstemious when she married Napoleon III, thirteen years later. Her wedding was an artistic triumph on several fronts, for, according to Philip Guedalla (in *The Second Empire*), the novelist Prosper Mérimée, 'drafted a wonderful marriage contract with an interminable recital of his young friend's dignities and quarterings, and Félix wrestled with the problems of *coiffeur* presented by a veil, a wreath of orange blossoms and an Imperial crown'.

The vogue for orange flowers is said to have originated

in France, but I have not found any indication that the British ever considered it a 'foreign fashion'. Wherever it came from, it was swiftly adopted and all alien origins speedily forgotten.

Usually the orange flowers were made of wax, but in the reports of some weddings 'real orange blossoms' are specified, and journalists at grand nuptials occasionally vowed that the air was heavy with the scent of these flowers, but that might have been over-enthusiasm, or over-writing.

By the early 1870s, Jeaffreson was pleading for relief from all-white headdresses, composed solely of 'yellow-white orange-flowers and other white buds and blossoms', a style which 'not one lovely girl in a thousand' could wear 'without disadvantage'. He also found the connection between orange blossom and fertility extremely distasteful (few trees it is said, are so prolific as the orange): 'Custom and romance have raised the chaplet of orange-blossoms to unmerited respect. The white of the orange-flower is an impure white, and the symbolism of the plant is a reason why some other flower should be adopted by the English bride.' He had no fault to find with the all-white wedding dress, however, pointing out that 'in our polite and richer classes, the girl who arranges to be married in any colour but white, takes a sure means of making her bridal doing talked about as savouring of eccentricity'.

The only occasion to which this did not apply, was when the bride was a widow, marrying again. Then Jeaffreson suggested 'a silk of sober or fuscous tint', in fact: 'any colour, with the single exception of black is more appropriate than white for a gentlewoman's robe of state at her second marriage . . . she has no more right to the dress of virginal brides than to the decoration of wreath and veil, or the services of bridesmaids.'

There was also a certain delicacy on the part of brides who were *known* to have forfeited their right to virgin white even though they had not precisely been married

before. The Reverend Francis Kilvert, in his lively diary, told a sad little tale of a Welsh 'concubine' who wore lilac when her philandering lover finally made an honest woman of her:

Wednesday, 5 July [1871]: This morning Edward Morgan of Cwmpelved Green brought his concubine to Church and married her. She was a girl of 19 rather nice looking and seemed quiet and modest. She had a pretty bridesmaid and they were both nicely prettily dressed in lilac and white. After the ceremony I saw the stout dwarf Anne Beavan pinning on bright nosegays.

A couple of weeks later Curate Kilvert paid a call on the new bride at her spotless cottage with its little garden 'flaming with nasturtiums':

A vase of bright fresh flowers stood upon each table and I could have eaten my dinner off every stone of the floor . . . The oven door was screened from view by a little curtain and everything was made the most and best of. I don't wonder Edward Morgan married the girl. It was not her fault that they were not married before. She begged and prayed her lover to marry her before he seduced her and afterwards. She was very stanch and faithful to him when she was his mistress and I believe she will make him a good wife . . . The girl said no one ever came near the house to see it, and she kept it as clean and neat and pretty as she could for her own satisfaction.

Ah, Victorian morality! A year earlier, the fine bridegroom had been before the magistrates on a paternity charge: 'An unsuccessful attempt by Samuel Evans' daughter and wife of the Bird's Nest to father the daughter's base child upon Edward Morgan of Cwmpelved Green. It came out that Mrs. Evans had been shameless enough to let the young man sit up at night with Emily after she and her husband had gone to bed. Mrs. V. most properly reprimanded her publicly and turned her out of the Club. Such conduct ought to be strongly marked and disapproved.' (Mrs. V. was the vicar's wife, and the

'Club', no doubt, was the Mother's Union. Such retribution!) No one seems to have done so much as cluck their tongue at the busy Mr. Morgan.

Earlier, Thackeray described the wedding of another unreliable bridegroom, Captain George Osborne, in *Vanity Fair*. The attendant menservants wrote off this occasion as a 'reg'lar shabby turn hout . . . with scarce so much as a breakfast or a wedding faviour', but it did have one 19th century essential — a glass coach. These covered carriages with large glass windows all round were the equivalent of today's big black limousines with white ribbons flying, and the sight of one immediately signified a wedding. Although Captain Osborne's bride, newly impoverished and disgraced by her father's bankruptcy, was dressed only in a 'brown silk pelisse . . . a straw bonnet with a pink ribbon' and a veil of white Chantilly lace, the gentlemen were very elegant indeed. The bridegroom wore a 'blue coat and brass buttons, and a neat buff waistcoat . . . his friend Captain Dobbin, in blue and brass, too', while Mr. Jos Sedley, the bride's brother, was magnificent: 'His shirt collars were higher; his face was redder; his shirt-frill flaunted gorgeously out of his variegated waistcoat. Varnished boots were not invented as yet; but the Hessians on his beautiful legs shone so, that they must have been the identical pair in which the gentleman in the old picture used to shave himself; and on his light green coat there bloomed a fine wedding favour, like a great white spreading magnolia.'

At the beginning of the century men's clothes were still as important as those of the ladies and just as open to criticism; but gradually the peacock plumes disappeared and the gentlemen became (and rightly so) a handsome, dark foil for the fashionable absurdities of their partners. Charles Lamb, in his essay *The Wedding*, told how he had met with great disapproval by wearing a sombre black coat while coloured ones were still the vogue, and forty years later, in 1861, the high priests of *Minister's Gazette of*

Fashion felt obliged to issue a public rebuke to all gentlemen who persisted in the same offence. 'Unfortunately,' they sighed, 'invisible green and even black frock coats are occasionally seen at weddings but both are inconsistent with the occasion except in the case of the marriage of a clergyman.' Instead, they advised blue, claret or mulberry frock coats, pale drab or lavender doeskin trousers, and waistcoats of white quilting.

In 1869, the *West End Gazette of Fashion* suggested, for the bridegroom, a short blue frock coat with a velvet collar and edging of silk cord; dove grey trousers; lavender gloves; and a light blue tie. 'The groomsman wears a frock coat with trousers and tie not quite so light and gay as the bridegroom's.' Despite such knowledgeable edicts, tail coats were still frequently worn instead of the newer 'frock' (Prince Louis of Hesse wore one when he married Queen Victoria's daughter, Princess Alice, at Osborne in July 1862), and some people with particularly nice judgment in such matters thought that a frock coat was 'not quite correct' for the bridegroom if the bride wore a veil. In the 1870s and '80s the battle was between frock coats and the even newer morning coat. The *Tailor and Cutter*, downing scissors and pins in 1886, had to admit to fashion anarchy on this point: 'There is no set style nowadays', they confessed. By 1899, however, all was firmly under control once more and they were able to make an absolute ruling for both bridegroom and best man: 'Black frock coat faced with silk. Double-breasted waistcoat of light colour and a dark tie, or a dark waistcoat with a light tie. Grey striped trousers. Patent-leather button boots. Pale tan kid gloves or grey suede. Silk hat.' Throughout the century, the hat gave least trouble of all: a black silk topper went with all manner of coats — tail, frock or morning — whatever the colour.

The best man, or groomsman as he was called until late in the century, needed only two qualifications for the job: he was expected to be a friend or relation of the groom, and he had to be a bachelor. There was no male equiv-

alent of the matron-of-honour, as Charles Dickens discovered when he asked his married publisher, John Macrone, to stand by him on his wedding day and then had to withdraw the honour:

My dear Macrone.

The unanimous voice of the ladies, confirms the authority of Mrs. Macrone. They say, with her, that I *must* be attended to the place of execution, by a single man: I have therefore engaged a substitute, and inclose you an Invite to the subsequent ceremonials, which of course you accept . . .

In feudal times the bridegroom's closest friend had assisted in the capture of the bride and, according to Jeaffreson, he was still 'expected to bleed freely in his friend's cause', though now in a more commercial manner: by buying a costly present. He was usually expected, too, to answer the toast to the bridesmaids, though this does not always seem to have been the case.

The bridesmaids themselves blossomed, multiplied, and flowered in greater and more exotic profusion as the century wore on. Or, as Jeaffreson put it: 'It is no uncommon thing for a bride of Victorian London to ask ten, or even twelve, maidens to gratify her love of display, and encourage her in the execution of a work of sublime self-sacrifice, by appearing in her bridal train with sympathising looks and harmonious dresses.' The lesser ranks of these platoons had little to do except look appealing, but their commander-in-chief, the senior bridesmaid, had an assortment of tasks and occasional perks. According to the 'immortal Mr. Adolphus Minn', who learned to become a gentleman by reading the *Manual for Ladies* (and whose tussle with the etiquette of matrimony was unfolded in *The Tatler* of 15 December 1877), it was her job to remove the bride's gloves when the priest asked 'Who giveth this woman . . .' and to hold them during the rest of the ceremony. Afterwards she could claim them 'as her guerdon or badge of office'. Before the wedding, again according to Jeaffreson, the chief bridesmaid was

expected to spend 'a few hours in attending the bride on shopping excursions, and gossiping with her about her *trousseau.* Like the inferior maidens [*the other bridesmaids*], she must grudge no needful time or expense for the execution of her official toilet. The night before the wedding she is sometimes required to pass in comparative unrest and imperfectly successful endeavours to reassure the bride that she will never repent the next day. On the wedding-day she enjoys herself more than any other woman concerned in the solemnity. Standing close to the bride in church, she holds the dear girl's fan and scent-bottle, and signs the register as witness after the performance of the marriage ceremony. Breakfast follows, and when the slipper has been thrown after the retiring carriage of the happy couple, her work is at an end, unless it is a wedding "with cards", and she is engaged to help in directing envelopes, and making out the invariably incomplete list of persons to whom cards ought to be sent.'

Cards were a printed notification that the wedding had taken place. They varied in style a great deal during the century, and were often on the verge of disappearing completely; but brides who failed to send them obviously felt they might well have been expected to do so, for the warning 'No cards' can sometimes be seen at the end of Victorian wedding announcements, in the same way that the plea 'No flowers' appears at the end of funeral notices today. Jeaffreson, writing in 1872, gave a potted history of the custom: 'In the days of our grandmothers, a bride's nuptial card was always an invitation to a banquet of sweetmeats, as well as an announcement of her marriage and future residence.' It gave her change of name and change of address, told the date of her return from the honeymoon and the 'particular days on which she would sit in state, to receive callers and regale them with wine and wedding-cake.' But from 1830 onwards 'fashion has been notably capricious and changeful with respect to wedding-cards and bridal receptions. She abolished successively the feast of sweetmeats and the ceremonious call

on one of several stated days. Then, for a while, she declared that a bride's cards should merely state her abode and the time "after" which she would be "at home" to callers fortunate enough to find her there. She next ordained that the bridal placard should say nothing about the sender's "home", should not even give its address. It should be a single undated card, sent in a plain envelope; it should be a contrivance of two cards joined together with silver thread; it should consist of two ordinary calling-cards — one the sender's, the other her groom's. Having invented half-a-hundred varieties of the bridal note, and discarded each of them after taking into brief favour, Fashion grew weary of nuptial cards, and proclaimed them antiquated things that should no longer be tolerated in polite society. At the present moment it is an open question amongst the guardians of our social proprieties, whether a bride should "send cards" or be married "without cards". But I am assured by many judicious ladies, who are greatly authoritative in feminine affairs, and hold fashion in no high esteem, that nuptial cards, announcing the bride's maiden name, wifely name, and London address, are never likely to go altogether out of use, as the neglect to distribute them is fruitful of divers inconveniences in the vast Babylon.'

Despite the prophesies of these authoritative ladies, this convenient custom has virtually died out in Britain. In North America, however, it flourishes still, though in its least communicative form. In both the United States and Canada, cards are regularly sent out to friends and relatives who could not attend the wedding (and sometimes, rather superfluously, even to those who did), but these handsome folded quarto sheets of light card or embossed paper (usually printed in black) almost invariably state only that Miss —, married Mr. —, at —, on such-and-such a date, and it is left to the recipient to play detective and find out where to write to congratulate them.

In Victorian times, there also appears to have been some confusion amongst the arbiters of etiquette as to who

should pay for the dresses of the bridesmaids. Jeaffreson inferred that the cost was borne by the girls themselves; while Mr. Adolphus Minn's *Manual for Ladies* ruled that: 'the bridegroom, if able and of a generous disposition will give a wedding dress to the bridesmaid, should there be only one. Should he not do it, she must provide her own. So likewise where there are several, the bridesmaids provide their own attire. The bride sends to each, the day before the wedding, the gloves to be worn on the occasion, wrapped up in white paper and tied with white ribbon'. Thackeray, however, in *Snobs and Marriage*, which he wrote for *Punch* in the 1840s, indicated that the grand gesture was for the bridegroom to pay for the lot.

As the century advanced white became the exception rather than the rule for bridesmaids. To give the bride 'an opportunity of shining singly' the attendants were dressed in colourful contrast. Pale blue and pink (often some of each) were the favourite colours, with lilac and pale green close behind. Rich shades were often used for trimmings, and sometimes for the dresses themselves.

Every conceivable type of headdress was worn, from garland of flowers and veils like the bride, through bonnets and little hats, rosebuds and jewels, to the large picture hats which came into vogue in the 1890s. Usually they carried posies (or at the end of the century, 'shower bouquets'), supplied by the bridegroom, and wore a keepsake of the occasion — most often a bracelet, locket or brooch — also 'a gift of the bridegroom'.

Their dresses, like that of the bride, usually followed the fashion of the day but, towards the end of the century, period costume also came into favour. The *Illustrated London News*, of 1 January 1885, reported that the bridesmaids of the Hon. Dulcibella Eden, daughter of Lord Auckland, wore outfits 'designed after Sir Joshua Reynolds' (who had flourished a hundred years earlier). They 'consisted of white satin petticoats, and overskirts of soft white silk, with pointed bodices and fichus of the

same, large caps, and yellow shoes and stockings'; and each bridesmaid carried 'a bunch of yellow chrysanthemums'. The pages 'were in Gainsborough costumes of cream ribbed serge, cloaks lined with yellow silk, and three-cornered white hats'. Eight years later, the *Lady's Pictorial* (15 July 1893) described a very pretty Norwich wedding, at which the bridesmaids wore 'Empire costume'. The bride and her family all strolled to church together on this occasion — as wedding parties had done in the 18th century — but everything else was strictly contemporary.

A far more typical wedding was that of Miss Georgina Potter in 1873. The bride was one of the nine Potter girls, a sister of Beatrice (later Mrs. Sidney Webb) of Fabian Society and London School of Economics fame. Beatrice, with four more of the sisters, was a bridesmaid, and a pretty formidable retinue they must have made: Malcolm Muggeridge (who married a niece of the bride) has described them as 'Massive, dark, restless looking women, who, one feels, might easily have savaged the photographer as he emerged from the protection of his black cloth'. The bridegroom was Daniel Meinertzhagen, of Viking and German descent, which was fairly exotic, too, but the details of the wedding day as carried in the *Gloucester Journal* of 13 September 1873, were exactly what every upper-class Victorian bride aspired to.

The whole village was *en fête.* A triumphal arch of greenery and flowers (with mottoes like 'Long life, health and happiness' and 'God bless you') decorated the gateway to the bride's house and there were other 'small erections along the route to the church'. At the church itself there was another large, leafy arch with more mottoes and the Union Jack flying from the tower, outside; banks of flowers, 'with evergreens and jasmine entwined around the altar rails', inside.

Shortly before 11 a.m. the guests began to arrive and the organist to play. The villagers crowded in after the main bridal party. The choir sang 'The Voice that

breathed o'er Eden' for the arrival of the bride and 'Mendelssohn's "Wedding March" poured forth from the organ at the conclusion of the ceremony, the church bells rang our a merry peal, and as the bride and bridegroom left the church some of the village school children strewed flowers in their path.' After which 'a sumptuous *dejeuner* was provided' at the bride's home.

Miss Potter wore white corded silk, trimmed with white satin and tulle, and a wreath of orange blossoms and clematis. Her bridesmaids — nine of them altogether — were in pink or green silk, 'trimmed with Valenciennes lace and ribbons and muslin flounces . . . tulle veils and wreaths of pink and white roses.'

At 2 p.m., the 'happy pair' left 'amid a shower of slippers' en route for London and the Continent. 'The wedding guests indulged in a dance in the evening and at nightfall there was a display of fireworks. The school children were feasted in the afternoon and the villagers were not forgotten.'

A son of the union, Richard Meinertzhagen, was later to divulge that the wedding tour was not free from what we now think of (no doubt unfairly) as typically Victorian difficulties. His mother, he said, 'in her puritan chastity could not respond to father's exuberance. In Paris my father insisted on buying for my mother most unsuitable hats.'

Sometimes, instead of the squire feasting his tenants, the tenants laid on celebrations for the squire — as happened in February 1868 when Earl Beauchamp married Lady Mary Stanhope. Subscriptions were raised by the people of Malvern, the nearest town to Lord Beauchamp's seat, Madresfield Court, and bustling committees prepared a day and night of festivities. The marriage ceremony took place in London — at that sacred haven of society, St. George's, Hanover Square — but the church bells of Malvern peeled out all morning just the same; flags flew all over the town, and everyone was out and about, parading the streets in their best clothes and

holiday spirits. Around one o'clock news that the marriage ceremony was complete reached the town by telegraph, whereupon the 'field guns of the Worcestershire Yeomany Cavalry, with a detachment of the artillery under the command of Captain Weaver, fired a salute from the knoll called St. Ann's Delight, and the bells of the Priory church were joyfully rung'. In the evening, Lord Beauchamp and his bride arrived on the scene themselves and were greeted by another ear-splitting salute and more bells. At seven o'clock a torchlight procession climbed up the hill called the Worcestershire Beacon to set light to the great bonfire halfway up, and enact a 'little scene' which features 'a personification of "Modern Malvern" and "the Genius of the Hills", and ended with the thousands of spectators joining in choruses of "Welcome to Earl Beauchamp and his lovely bride".'

The *Illustrated London News*, which reported all this, gave special mention to 'Mr. W. Archer, the Railway Hotel', who constructed the magnificent bonfire from: '1300 faggots, twenty-four cords of ash, four truckloads of old railway-sleepers, one hundred tar barrels, six barrels of pitch, 1500 hop-poles, thirty-six gallons of petroline, 120 cartloads of gorse, six waggon-loads of larch-croppings, and two tons of coal.' At nine o'clock there was a display of 'rockets, shells, and coloured flares . . . in the presence of an immense number of spectators. In addition to this, several fire-balloons were sent up, and the electric and oxy-hydrogen lights were exhibited at intervals from the abbey tower and the top of the library with at times an almost magical effect among the old trees and buildings, raising the most singular moving shadows, finely contrasting with the changing coloured lights.' The boys of Malvern College also built a bonfire, in the school grounds, in honour of the marriage, Lord Beauchamp being the 'liberal patron, and president of the council of that rising and popular college. Many hearty cheers were given by the boys for the noble Earl and his bride.'

Schoolchildren less privileged than those at Malvern College were regularly feasted on these occasions — as at the Meinertzhagen-Potter wedding — though often they had to sing for their supper first. These were the days of charity schools and the lady of the great house was usually actively engaged in the running of them; when a child of the great house married, the charity children were lined up in matching uniforms, either along the aisle inside the church, or the path outside it, and were often given the task of strewing flowers before the bride.

At the beginning of the century the wedding group in church was still mostly very small, with a wider circle of relatives and friends being asked to the breakfast. But, by the 1850s, a large congregation had become the fashionable aim, and 'the church was crammed' was a most gratifying thing to be able to say. In November 1851, the marriage of the Duke of Richmond's daughter, Lady Augusta Lennox, to Prince Edward of Saxe-Weimar, was particularly successful in this respect. Lord Malmesbury recorded (in his *Memoirs of an Ex-Minister*), that it 'went off very well, to the great edification of an immense congregation. The church was so full that several ladies got into the pulpit'. With such a mass of spectators, charity children lining the aisles, and the bride sweeping in late with ten or twelve bridesmaids, it is not surprising that wedding music was now introduced as the final flourish: it was invaluable for signalling the important moments, bridging awkward gaps, and pulling the whole spectacle, in general, into one neat and dramatic package. What is surprising is that the chosen music should have come, in most cases, from the repertoire of the profane rather than the sacred. Mendelssohn's *Wedding March*, which was the first piece to become inextricably linked with the marriage ceremony, was composed as part of his incidental music to Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (and it was composed in 1826, when Mendelssohn was only 17); twenty years later, Wagner wrote his wedding

march (strictly speaking his *Bridal Chorus*) for the secular *Lohengrin* and his bride, Elsa of Brabant. Even in Catholic France, at the magnificent Nôtre Dame wedding of Napoleon III, it was music from the stage rather than the church which accompanied the Empress Eugénie on her way to the altar: the march from Meyerbeer's *Le Prophète*, an opera which had been premiered in Paris four years earlier.

Mendelssohn's *Wedding March* is thought to have first been played at a wedding in 1847, the year Novello's originally published the music — as a piano duet. Samuel Reay, an enterprising young organist (who was later to become famous both as a performer and composer) immediately adapted it for his own instrument — and one pair of hands — and played it at a wedding in the parish church of Tiverton, Devon. In 1858 it accompanied Queen Victoria's eldest daughter, the Princess Royal, as she walked out of St. James's Chapel on the arm of Prince Frederick William of Prussia, and it has been fashionable ever since; though it was not chosen when the Princess Royal's brother, Albert Edward, Prince of Wales (the future Edward VII) married the beautiful Princess Alexandra of Denmark five years later. According to Queen Victoria's own account of that occasion (set down in detail in her Journal on the night of the wedding), Handel's *Processional March* was played for the entrance of the bride and Beethoven's *Hallelujah Chorus* (from his oratorio, *The Mount of Olives*) for her exit. In between, *Albert's Chorale* was sung, a work composed by the Prince Consort, who had died only fifteen months before the wedding. The whole congregation turned their beady, intrusive eyes on the newly-widowed Queen at this point, and rushed to record how she had taken it as soon as they got home: 'When a chorale composed by Prince Albert began, she gave a look upwards, which spoke volumes', wrote Lord Granville. The Queen herself noted, with sad simplicity, it 'affected me much'.

Until the 1880s, Handel's *Occasional Overture* was the

music which immediately meant the arrival of the bride to most people, and this also was played at several royal weddings. Princess Beatrice, the last of Queen Victoria's children to marry, was accompanied to the altar by it in 1885; but, four years later, at the next important royal marriage (that of Princess Louise of Wales), the *Illustrated London News* reported: 'As the well known music of Wagner's March from "*Lohengrin*" came from the organ the bride entered on the arm of the Prince of Wales.' Both in America — where, three years earlier, it had been played at the wedding of President Grover Cleveland (with Sousa conducting) — and in Britain, the *Bridal Chorus* had arrived to stay. Though in America, perversely, Wagner's *Here Comes the Bride!* was played for the *departure* of the bride at some weddings (as it was at President Cleveland's), while Mendelssohn heralded her arrival.

There was great scope for marches at royal weddings since there were so many processions. The clergy usually arrived first — the Archbishop of Canterbury at the head of a dozen or so deans and chaplains. (At the wedding of Queen Victoria's third son, the Duke of Connaught, this priestly assemblage took their places to 'the minuet to the overture to Samson', by Handel.) The royal guests and their suites were next up the aisle; then the Queen with her household; followed by the bridegroom with his supporters; and finally the bride. Handel's march from *Hercules* and his *Processional March* were often played; while Mendelssohn's march from *Athalie* usually accompanied the bridegroom, sometimes the Queen, and at the wedding of the Prince of Wales it was played for the royal guests. The royal organist at Windsor, Sir George Elvey, composed a special march, called *Albert Edward*, for the Prince of Wales himself, and this was also played (by Sir George) for the entrance of the Prince of Wales's brother, the Duke of Connaught, on his wedding day. When the Queen's youngest son, Leopold, Duke of Albany, married in 1882. Her Majesty very grandly com-

missioned Charles Gounod to write a special march for his German bride. Handel's *Hallelujah Chorus* from the *Messiah* was sung on at least one occasion, and Beethoven's, from *The Mount of Olives*, on several.

At humbler weddings, 'the service was fully choral' was now a nice thing to be able to include in the wedding notices. ('The service was fully choral, and the church, which was crowded to excess, was tastefully decorated with palms and flowers', read a *Lady's Pictorial* wedding report in July 1893, greatly to the comfort of the bride's mother, no doubt.)

For the celebrations which followed, military bands were favoured both by royalty and those subjects who could afford such magnificence.

During most of the 19th century, twelve noon continued to be the deadline for weddings performed in church without a special licence, and this was, no doubt, the main reason for the great popularity of wedding breakfasts, or, more genteelly, *déjeûners*. An early start to the great day also allowed bride and groom to set out on their fashionable wedding-trip at a reasonable hour. Some marriages, like the one to which Charles Lamb wore his abused black coat, took place at eight o'clock in the morning, and then the wedding breakfast really was a breakfast, though a superior one. But even when the ceremony was squeezed in at the other end of the canonical timetable, the meal which followed — by rights a luncheon — was still called a breakfast, and so it continued to be until a few years ago, when 'wedding reception' became a general cover-all for everything from full-blown dinner to *canapés* and curled sandwiches. Very early on the pattern became much the same as the one we follow still, with all its pleasures and all its agonies. Disraeli told his sister on 15 July 1841: 'Yesterday Lord Villiers was married to Peel's daughter; the church crammed, and at the breakfast Prince George proposed the health of the bride and bridegroom. Peel acknowledged the toast, and spoke

shortly, but so pathetically that Lord Jersey burst into violent tears. During his sketch of the character of a *good* man. Wilton was seen gradually to grow redder and redder, till at length the personal allusions overcame him, and he also audibly wept.' For every bride today who dreads the same upsurge of parental pathos, who *knows* that the speech which was going to be so jolly is bound to end in a flood of tears, there may perhaps be some small consolation in the knowledge that even the great Sir Robert Peel couldn't help himself either.

The centre-piece of the feast was now a towering cake, such as we know today, and towards the end of the century, newspaper reports of marriages often ended with the name of the maker: 'The wedding cake was supplied by Messrs. W. and G. Buzard, of Oxford Street, W.' added a touch of class to the account, while 'The wedding cake was supplied by Messrs. Bolland and Sons, of Chester', indicated that absolutely no expense whatsoever had been spared. At royal weddings it was, and still is, the custom for great baking concerns to present a cake to the bride, and in 1871, when Queen Victoria's fourth daughter, Princess Louise, married the Marquis of Lorne, Messrs. Bolland and Sons sent a magnificent example of their wares to Windsor Castle. According to the *Illustrated London News*, it was made 'in three tiers, placed on a gold stand weighing about 2 cwt., and measuring at the base of the lower cake 2 ft. in diameter, and in height nearly 5 ft. The gold plateau had the Royal arms at four equal distances, with Cupids and flowers. The lower tier was ornamented with blue panels, baskets of flowers, fruit, and love-birds between a scroll leaf, and medallions containing likenesses of the Marquis of Lorne and Princess Louise, with their respective coronets above. The second tier was festooned with the rose, shamrock, and thistle. The third tier was entirely of network, with cornucopias and shields, on which were the monograms of the bride and bridegroom. The whole was surmounted by a handsome vase

of flowers, with silk banners edged with silver fringe, containing the armorial bearings of the Princess and of the Marquis. Each tier of the cake was bordered with trellis-work studded with pearls.' However, the 'principal cake on the table, at the wedding breakfast', was that made by Her Majesty's chief confectioner at Windsor Castle. This 'perfect triumph of the confectioner's art', was 5 ft. 4 in. high, and had a diameter of 2 ft. 6 in. 'The base was decorated with white satin, bearing coats of arms, and initials "L.L." entwined in blue, wreaths of orange-blossom, and small vases containing the same flowers. Within an alcove above the base was a fountain, with doves drinking, and around this miniature temple were four statues, representing Agriculture, Fine Arts, Commerce, and Science. The upper part was crowned by a figure of a vestal virgin. All the figures and ornaments were of sugar.' Besides these two giants, there were also 'presentation cakes for the Royal Family', and '300 lb. of wedding cake for distribution' (all made by Gunters of Berkeley Square).

Grand weddings in America were also occasionally graced by more than one cake, though here it was brought about by the great American tradition of 'his' and 'hers'. In October 1874, when the guests filed into the Chicago dining-room of Mr. Henry Hamilton Honoré, following the marriage of his daughter to young Colonel Frederick Grant (eldest son of President Ulysses S. Grant), they found at one end of the 14-foot table a 'Bride's Cake, decorated with natural flowers', and at the other end a 'Groom's Cake decorated with natural flowers'.

The custom of threading cake through the ring was still popular, though with one small change: the Victorians, more superstitious than their 18th century forebears, were not so willing to tempt fate by removing their wedding rings once they had been put in place at the altar. The cutting and threading was now done the day before the ceremony. According to the immortal Mr. Minn's *Manual for Ladies*: 'To the bridesmaids, the day before

the wedding, is assigned the duty of cutting small strips of cake and passing them through the wedding ring — woe betide them should they lose it! The pieces, about the size of a small little finger — are then wrapped up in ornamental papers of the latest novelty in design and colour ... and fastened with some pretty device. These mystic condiments are distributed at the wedding breakfast to the young unmarried guests if any desire to possess the charming morsel.'

Oatcakes were still broken over the bride's head in Scotland, and in some parts of England elaborately iced creations received the same rough treatment. According to Jeaffreson: 'So tenacious are men of superstitious practices and pleasant social ways, that a monstrous, costly wedding-cake, fresh from Chester — *the* English capital for wedding confectionery — is even yet knocked and wrenched into fragments, in a north country yeoman's parlour, over the head of a blushing lass.' Yorkshire wedding guests had a different way of dealing with it: 'when an East-Riding bride is on the point of crossing her father's threshold after returning from church, a plate containing a few spare pieces of cake is thrown from an upper window of the house, for the purpose of learning whether she will be a happy or wretched wife. If the plate on reaching the ground breaks, she will be happy; but if it is unbroken, she will not escape injury. It is needless to say that the near kinsman of the bride, who sends the platter from the window, takes good care that the omen is satisfactory. In some parts of Lancashire and Cumberland it is customary to put a ring amongst the ingredients of the cake, and to invite the guests in turn to cut a slice. The person who holds the knife when it comes upon the hidden ring, is deemed to be sure of happiness for at least twelve months.'

At most wedding feasts, the presents were put on show for the guests to admire — and the display became progressively more splendid as the century wore on. Jeaffreson

wrote in the 1870s: 'Of late years, instead of decreasing in number and value, these customary offerings have surpassed, in variety and richness, the presents given to brides in Georgian England. In the gentle and fairly prosperous middle classes they sometimes comprise such costly tributes as a grand piano, a harp, a carriage, a silver or silver-gilt tea equipage, a service of choice porcelain. The bride, who receives these handsome gifts from her more affluent well-wishers, and, it may be, considerable sums of money from rich uncles, aunts, or god-parents, is also the recipient of scores of those tasteful, and comparatively inexpensive, articles that dealers in jewelry and fanciful contrivances are wont to press upon their customers as things suitable for bridal offerings.'

The most remarkable thing about these presents, to Jeaffreson's mind, was that: 'they are given to the gentle bride by her social inferiors, as well as by her equals and superiors — by the servants of her father's household, his tradesmen, and his tenants. On no other occasion but her marriage would the well-to-do and self-respecting paterfamilias consent that his daughter should become the recipient of material favours that may, in the least offensive sense of the term, be called benefactions. Given to her at any other time, the gifts, which, on the eve of her wedding occasion him lively satisfaction, in being tokens of his child's and his own popularity, would be repudiated indignantly as so many insults.'

By the end of the century relatives, and even friends, often simplified the deal by giving cheques — a custom which, said Miss Betham Edwards, deeply shocked the French. It was true, she wrote, that 'grandparents, uncles, and cousins may present a [*French*] bride with an elegant purse containing money or notes', and that 'a considerable sum of money enclosed in an envelope' had become an acceptable substitute for the bridegroom's traditional *corbeille* — the 'rich velvets and silks, furs, old lace, family and modern jewels, a fan, and a missal, all packed in elegant basket or straw box lined with satin'

which had for centuries been the French bridegroom's customary offering to his bride — but, 'a wedding gift in the form of a cheque shocks French susceptibilities'. On the other hand, the British shuddered at the exhibition of the 'entire trousseau. . . the spreading before everybody's eyes of slips and stockings . . .' which went on at wedding feasts in France. Jewellery was the most usual present for a British bridegroom to give his bride, and of all the jewels, a pearl necklace was, for those who could afford it, the most popular gift of all. Among the not-so-wealthy, something on more practical lines was often chosen, like the ivory fitted work-box which Charles Dickens gave to his bride and which, perhaps with a young author's justifiable pride in his own best-selling name, he had inscribed: 'From Chas. Dickens to Kate, April 2nd. 1836'.

There was no legal or canonical bar to marriage at any time of the year during the 19th century, though most Christians voluntarily considered Lent as too solemn a season for wedding festivities. It was now that the tag 'Marry in Lent, and you'll live to repent' superseded 'Marry in May, and you'll rue the day', which had been the warning when the church forbade weddings during the greater part of that month. The Romans had also thought May an inappropriate time to marry since they then had feasts to appease the spirits of the dead. One of Ovid's lines on this, '*Mense malas maio nubere vulgus ait*' — 'Wantons marry in the month of May' — was pinned to the gates of Holyrood Palace on 15 May 1567, the day Mary Queen of Scots made her fateful marriage with Bothwell. But there was no such vulgar incident when Queen Victoria's daughter, Princess Louise, married the Marquis of Lorne during the Lent of 1871. Sunday, however, was now sacrosanct indeed, and a wedding on this once most popular wedding day of all would have met with a universal frown of disapproval. 'Victorian Englishmen', said Jeaffreson, 'very generally

concur in holding a particular day of each week, i.e., a seventh of the entire year, as too sacred for bridal mirth. A fashionable wedding, celebrated on the Lord's Day in London, or any part of England, would now-a-days be denounced by the religious people of all Christian parties as an outrageous exhibition of impiety.' Even Queen Victoria, who thought the gloom of a British Sunday vastly overdone, didn't go against that one.

The one church ruling which did prove irksome was the ban on marriages after mid-day. Now that the actual ceremony was carried out in such splendour before a full church and followed by a considerable feast, often for several hundred people, this time-limit was thought to concentrate the main festivities in the wrong half of the day and to leave a nasty gap before the grand finale of dinner or ball could begin. There were other discomforts, too, as Jeaffreson pointed out: 'The Victorian gentlewoman, who seldom rises from her bed before half-past eight, or breakfast earlier than half-past nine, must be up long before her usual rising-hour, if she would make an elaborate toilet, take a leisurely first breakfast, see half-a-score of friends, and drive to church in time for marriage before twelve o'clock.' When the main breakfast had 'terminated with hilarity, occasioned by drink, which every feaster has done his best to shirk, several hours must be spent in a dismal affectation of jollity till the time for the evening dance arrives. If the weather is fine, and the bridal-house in the country, the men of the tedious *fête* may go away for a cigar and a walk, whilst the bridesmaids are sleeping off the fatigue of the morning, and refreshing themselves for the ball.'

But if it were wet, the only answer was the billiard room, and, as Jeaffreson had to admit, even in Victorian England, not every house had a billiard room. Then, in this jaundiced view of such jolly occasions, there was the problem of eating a large dinner after coping with a bridal breakfast: 'The man must combine the distinguishing characteristics of an alderman and a boa-constrictor, who

can dine happily after the violent delights and cloying pleasures of a wedding-luncheon.' Jeaffreson (and one can't help feeling he wrote all this after a particularly heavy wedding) hoped that the church's hours for celebrating marriage would be extended 'so that a bride may be married at church late in the afternoon, and a pleasant bridal dinner be substituted for the inopportune wedding-breakfast'.

In 1885, his wish nearly came true. The government brought in a three-hour extension. Speedier journeys on the new-fangled railroads still allowed brides and grooms to reach their honeymoon destinations (the fashion magazines greeted the new hours with much talk of brides now getting married in their going-away clothes), while the friends they left behind them could drift almost painlessly on from wedding tea to gala dinner.

Earlier in the century, the Marriage Act of 1836 had made life easier in other directions: this was the bill which introduced civil marriages, and set up the machinery for civil registrars and registry offices. It also made wedding ceremonies in Catholic churches and the meeting houses of Protestant dissenters legal, so long as a civil registrar was present at the time. Before this bill Catholics and dissenters still had to go through two wedding ceremonies — the Catholic, or dissenting, one to satisfy their religion, and the Anglican one to please the State. The complications which this could cause are described, in many crazy variations, in *The Recollections of a Northumbrian Lady*, 1815–1866, the memoirs of Barbara Charlton, daughter of one old northern Catholic family (the Tasburghs, of Yorkshire), who married into another (the Charltons of Hesleyside, Northumberland).

Mrs. Charlton herself had three wedding ceremonies — one of them at Gretna Green — while her two older sisters made do with two apiece. The middle sister, Fanny, was the first to marry, and her wedding was a model of how such things should be done. The Catholic ceremony was performed quietly in the private chapel at

their family home, by the Tasburghs' chaplain, the Abbé le Roux. Then, a few hours later, bride and groom, with two bridesmaids, family and guests, went to the local Anglican parish church for 'a pretty country wedding'. In such cases, the Catholic ceremony was usually by far the quieter of the two; often taking place before breakfast and before the family had dressed in their wedding finery.

Three years later, Mary, the eldest sister, fell in love with a non-Catholic, and where for Fanny everything had gone right, for Mary everything went chaotically wrong. First of all her father turned nasty, and then the priesthood played up. Life became so uncomfortable at home that she went to live with the previously married Fanny and the wedding was planned to take place from her house. Suddenly, on the morning of the chosen day, the priest refused to marry her, 'although no canon law deterred him from doing so', saying that the Church of England ceremony was all that was necessary. As no other Catholic priest could be found at such short notice, they decided to reverse the order of things and be married in the Anglican church first, then drive 40 miles through winter snows to the bride's family home, in the hope that the old Abbé le Roux would take care of the Catholic part. At ten o'clock on their wedding night, Mary and her husband got the 80-year-old, rather deaf Abbé out of his bed and into 'a dirty old snuff-coloured dressing-gown and slippers, surmounted by a white night-cap sticking up a foot and a half above his head'. When he finally understood what was wanted of him, he sent his maid-servant out into the snow-covered garden with a lantern to pick a spray of old-man's-beard, as there was 'no *aspergés* with which to give a nuptial blessing', and did the deed. Another Tasburgh girl was well and truly married.

But not quite so well as Mrs. Charlton herself was to become. Though she had chosen an eminently suitable Catholic partner, her disagreeable father this time found fault with the marriage settlement, and called off the en-

gagement. After months of being forbidden to see the young man, periods of confinement to her room, and an exciting exchange of clandestine letters, one summer night Barbara Tasburgh finally tore a sheet to shreds, knotted the pieces together, tied them to the leg of a heavy sofa, swung out of her bedroom window and climbed to the ground, to be met by her lover with a hired chaise and post-horses. At Gretna Green the 'blacksmith' charged an exorbitant £20 for his services, and at Carlisle they pawned their jewellery to get them back to London. There, Mrs. Charlton was married again, at a Protestant church, to make quite sure all was legal, wearing a borrowed 'pink muslin dress (far too big for me)'. And, once again, it was the Catholic blessing which proved hardest to come by. 'We had the greatest difficulty in getting a priest to marry us in London,' she was to write in doughty old age, 'not on account of our escapade, but for the reason, if you please, that our great-grandmothers ... were sisters, and also perhaps, a little on account of the Protestant ceremony having preceded the Catholic one.' Eventually a Jesuit was found 'who consented to perform the Catholic ceremony privately in his room.'

For more conventional brides and bridegrooms the honeymoon was now firmly established, and though borrowing the home of a friend or relative, or going to one of the bridegroom's own estates, for the first few days or weeks, was still popular, a Continental tour was now the fashionable thing to do. Lord Clarendon's daughter, Alice, who married Lord Skelmersdale on 16 August 1860, took a typically leisurely and wide-sweeping excursion immediately following her wedding. On 20 September, the Earl wrote to the Duchess of Manchester from Wiesbaden, to say that 'the Skelmies' had just joined up with him there ('and two such happy faces as those wd: enliven anyone'); they were to stay a few days and then go off again on their own 'via Lucern and St. Gothard to Venice'. Paris was another favourite spot — when the rebellion wasn't

raging: Charles Lamb's adopted daughter, Emma Isola, and her bookseller husband Edward Moxon, made directly for this traditional city of romance, after their wedding on 30 July 1833; on 9 September they were still there — 'Moxon, who is flaunting it about *à la Parisienne*, with his new bride, our Emma, much to his satisfaction, and not a little to our dulness', Lamb wrote to H. F. Cary, on that date — and they did not return to cheer up the Lamb household until the end of the month. In the 1890s Norway came into favour, and a 'Norwegian Yachting Cruise' could be embarked on for '12 Guineas, including a sumptuous table'. The vessel was the 'Midnight Sun (Captain Nivison R.N.R.), 3020 tons, 2860 horse-power, sailing fortnightly'. In 1893, the Great Eastern Railway boasted the 'Cheapest Continental Holiday — Brussels and back: 29s.', while 97 shillings bought honeymooners a return ticket to Switzerland.

Of the English resorts, Brighton (made popular by the Prince Regent at the beginning of the century) was much in vogue. Thackeray in *Vanity Fair* arranged for 'Miss Emilia's honeymoon' to be spent there; she and Captain George driving down from London, in 1815, in their carriage with the four horses thought to be most suitable for such journeys. They had 'engaged apartments at the Ship Inn', where they 'enjoyed themselves . . . in great comfort and quietude', until presently they were joined by the bride's brother, Jos, the Regency beau. The Isle of Wight was also popular, though not quite so smart. Here, according to Jeaffreson, 'to afford suitable accommodation for spouses desirious of passing the first days of their matrimony in retirement and charming scenery, speculators built in the choicest spots of the lovely island those attractive honeymoon hotels, such as the Sandrock and Shanklin inns, — ivy-and-myrtle-covered tenements, partitioned into little pigeon-hole sitting-rooms and bedrooms, — in which proud boys and happy girls still [1872] delight to bill and coo in blissful unconcern of everything but love'.

Jeaffreson set down the pattern of 19th century honeymoons like this: 'In the first two decades of the present century the honeymoon trip of a married couple, who, though of gentle quality, were too busy or thrifty to think of spending much time or money on a romantic excursion, seldom exceeded ten days or a fortnight. The London merchant or lawyer took his London bride to Bath or Tunbridge Wells or Brighton for seven or eight days, and on returning to town she entered her new home in Finsbury Circus or Guildford Street, feeling herself to have seen much of her native land. The country clergyman or provincial doctor took his spouse for as short a time to London, to see the parks and theatres, St. Paul's and the Tower . . . But in these later years the increasing facilities for travel have caused the majority of our spouses to regard the trip to the nearest of our Channel islands as too tame and unadventurous for the happy pair, who have time and money for a run to the Pyrenees, Switzerland, or the Italian lakes.' Sir William Des Voeux, a distinguished British colonial administrator with aristocratic connections, described (in *My Colonial Service*) a very upper-class mixture of foreign and British travel. Following his wedding in July 1875 he said: 'After a wedding tour of three weeks we returned for a few days to Footscray Place, Mr. Pender's residence in Kent, and then went for a round of visits in Scotland . . . Returning to Footscray Place and spending the final fortnight there.' In late September (after a two-month honeymoon — though Des Voeux never mentioned the still fractionally low-class word) he sailed with his new bride to become Administrator and Colonial Secretary of St. Lucia in the West Indies.

Queen Victoria, never as stuffy as she has been made out to be, embraced the word honeymoon very early on and used it in a letter to her uncle, King Leopold of the Belgians, two years after her own wedding. Writing of the intended marriage of Prince Ernest of Saxe-Coburg-Gotha, brother of the Prince Consort, she said: 'Ernest's

marriage is a *great, great delight* to us; thank God, I say, as I so ardently wished it, and Alexandrina is said to be really *so* perfect. I have begged Ernest beforehand to pass his honeymoon with us, and I beg you to urge him to do it; for he witnessed our first happiness, and we must therefore witness his.' Journals like the *Illustrated London News* evolved their own code on such delicate matters, and it was often extremely subtle: by 1870 the word honeymoon was generally used for all except royal brides and grooms; but Princess Louise, who married the non-royal, the Marquis of Lorne; in 1871, was reported to have 'returned from her honeymoon', while the Mediterranean cruise of her brother, the Duke of Connaught, and his Prussian Princess, in 1879, was described as a 'wedding tour'.

Whatever the social status of the 'newly-married pair', the traditional send off as they left for their honeymoon or wedding tour was a shower of old shoes — or satin slippers, as they were usually described. Flowers were also sometimes thrown, and by the 1870s another missile had appeared — rice. (How odd it is that the prim Victorian era should have brought forth all these fertility symbols.) By 1884 the custom had become so firmly established on both sides of the Atlantic, that New Yorker Mrs. Mary Sherwood could rule in her etiquette book: 'As the happy pair drive off a shower of satin slippers and rice follow them. If a slipper alights on top of the carriage, luck is assured to them for ever.' This last good omen was not always left to providence alone; at the wedding of Alice Lee Roosevelt in 1906, 'a slipper was placed on top of the automobile for good luck'. Slippers were thrown at all royal weddings in England, and at the marriage of Princess Louise a broom was added to the barrage — an ancient Highland custom, it was said. At the marriage of the future King George V and Queen Mary, in 1893, the bridegroom's father and uncle, the Prince of Wales and the Duke of Connaught, and the bride's uncle, the Duke of Cambridge, stood inside the railings of Buckingham

Palace looking like a group of naughty schoolboys, ready to throw rice at the bridal couple as they drove by *en route* for Liverpool Street Station and Sandringham.

Although public emphasis was now all on the romantic aspect of matrimony, private belief in the solid marriage settlement and the 'suitable' match continued to run deep. Not everyone shared Lord Clarendon's broad-minded view that 'provided the poverty was not extreme' a girl should marry the man most likely to make her happy; many a stern Victorian father still showed quite reasonable suitors to the door — and many a daughter still, undutifully, ran off to Gretna Green. In May 1835, all London was '*en émoi*', according to Lord Malmesbury, over the elopement of Sir Colquhoun Grant's daughter with Brinsley Sheridan, grandson of the playwright. Sneakily, they had waited until Sir Colquhoun was in Poole, canvassing his constituency, and then made a dash for Scotland. Ten years later, Malmesbury recorded: 'Nothing is talked of in London today but the elopement of Lady Adela Villiers with Captain Ibbotson. Poor Lady Jersey is much distressed.' However this wasn't exactly a new scandal in the Jersey family, for in 1804, Lady Adela's father had run off with her mother, the Earl of Westmorland's eldest daughter, heiress to Child's banking fortune.

The conspiracy to turn all Gretna Green couplers into blacksmiths was still going strong. Barbara Charlton said: she was 'taken to the house of the blacksmith' in 1839; and at the most celebrated abduction trial of the century, the flamboyant statesman and barrister, Henry Brougham, using one of the oldest legal tricks in the book, persisted in calling the man who had performed the marriage 'Mr. Blacksmith', even though he established early in his cross-examination that the fellow, hardly the build for a man of the forge, anyway, had previously been a pedlar. This trial was held at Lancaster Assizes in March 1827 and the chief of the accused was Edward Gibbon

Wakefield, a widower with several children, who had neatly plucked a 15-year-old heiress, Ellen Turner, from her Liverpool boarding school (by saying that her father was ill and wanted her), and then persuaded her to marry him at Gretna Green. Willian Hone printed much of the evidence in his *Table Book* which was published the same year as the trial. The coupler in the case was David Laing who was dressed in spanking-new, vaguely clerical dress for the occasion and conducted his own case 'with a ludicrous expression of gravity upon his features'. The practice of the abductor in such enterprises was to get the girl to pay the 'parson' — and often to order the horses for the last stage from Carlisle — to prove her willingness in the affair; Laing testified that having married them after the Scotch form, that is, by putting on the ring on the lady's finger . . . I think I told the lady that I generally had a present from 'em, as it may be, of such a thing as money to buy a pair of gloves, and she gave me, with her own hand, a twenty-shilling Bank of England note to buy them.'

In later cross-examination, he admitted receiving another £50 from the bridegroom and a liberal supply of '*Shumpine*' (champagne) with which to toast the happy pair. (He also made it clear that the ceremony took place at an inn, not a smithy.)

Laing was proud to testify that he had 'been in the courts of Edinburgh and Dublin', and that his marriages had always 'been held legal'; which proved to be the case with the Wakefield-Turner marriage. The bridegroom was jailed for abduction, but it took a special Act of Parliament to dissolve the union.

The days of *Shumpine* and £50 fees were soon to come to an end in Gretna Green. In July 1856, a law was passed making all marriages invalid in Scotland unless one of the parties had resided there for 21 days prior to the wedding. There was no longer anything to be gained by a trip over the border.

The forbidden match which had the whole of high

society in a ferment of gossip and a flurry of note-sending (all the latest details), was that of Lady Susan Clinton, daughter of the Duke of Newcastle, and Lord Adolphus Vane-Tempest, son of Lord Londonderry, which took place in London, four years after the demise of Gretna Green. Queen Victoria herself was deeply concerned with this one, since Lady Susan had been a bridesmaid at the Princess Royal's marriage two years earlier. 'Only think,' Her Majesty wrote to her eldest daughter in April 1860, 'Lady Susan P. Clinton has gone and married Lord Adolphus Vane, who drinks and has twice been shut up for delirium tremens ... Lord Adolphus is a good creature and not the one who did all those dreadful things,* but between drink and his natural tendency to madness there is a sad prospect for poor Susan.' In May, the Queen followed up with a delightfully naughty postscript: '... There is a dreadful bon-mot about Lady Susan Vane (Clinton) that there is a bet which of the two will be confined first!!'

Most brides considered the drama of the new style church weddings as romantic as any elopement and these were now the aim of all classes. To be married in white was a dream within the grasp of almost all. The price of clothes (thanks, no doubt, to the Industrial Revolution) had become a great deal more reasonable, and almost every girl who wished to wear white on her wedding day could now afford to. In 1874, Peter Robinson advertised 'Wedding dress. 18s. 9d. to 200s.' (though they, like most other dress firms, were far more interested in providing mourning, in all degrees of grimness, and must have devoted at least 75 per cent of their advertising budget to this dismal end). In 1871, the material for even a sumptuous crinoline of rich, white 'Moire Antique' could be bought for as little as '£3 17s. the Dress of 11 yds.' and 'Brussels

* The one who *did* do all the dreadful things was Lord Ernest Vane-Tempest, and perhaps the worst of them was his attack on the actresses' dressing-rooms in a Windsor theatre. When the Manager objected, Lord Ernest threw him down a flight of stairs.

kid gloves', ideal for a wedding, cost 1s. 11½d. So, dressed in as close a copy of an aristocratic wedding gown as she could manage, the less fortunate bride planned celebrations of as genteel a nature as she could command. After the church ceremony, a wedding dinner at the bride's own home was the thing to aim for, and Dickens described just such an event in his story of *The Mistaken Milliner. A Tale of Ambition* (from *Sketches by Boz*). In this case, as was often so in previous centuries, it was the bridegroom, an 'ornamental painter and decorator's journeyman', who provided the feast:

It was a charming party; Somers'-town the locality, and a front parlour the apartment. The ornamental painter and decorator's journeyman had taken a house — no lodgings nor vulgarity of that kind, but a house — four beautiful rooms, and a delightful little washhouse at the end of the passage, which was the most convenient thing in the world for the bridesmaids could sit in the front parlour and receive the company, and then run into the little washhouse and see how the pudding and boiled pork were getting on in the copper, and then pop back into the parlour again, as snug and comfortable as possible. . .

Then the dinner. There was baked leg of mutton at the top [*of the table*], boiled leg of mutton at the bottom, pair of fowls and leg of pork in the middle; porter-pots at the corners; pepper, mustard, and vinegar in the centre; vegetables on the floor; and plum-pudding and apple-pie and tartlets without number, to say nothing of cheese, and celery, and watercresses, and all that sort of thing.

Deep in the country genteel fashions held less sway and many of the most ancient customs continued to thrive, with entire neighbourhoods still turning out to honour the bride and groom and take part in nuptial sports. Canon John Atkinson, vicar of Danby in the North Riding of Yorkshire until his death in 1900, gave an excellent account of weddings in his part of the world in his book *Forty Years in a Moorland Parish* (1891). Riding for the kail had died out just before his

incumbency, but racing on foot for the bride's colours continued to flourish. The most typical Dales wedding he had witnessed, he said, took place in about 1850, on Martinmas Day:

But I should not have spoken of the event in the singular number; for there were, in point of fact, four weddings, all to be solemnised. After the ceremony was over, great was the scramble among the small boys for the coppers which it was and is customary for the newly married man or his best man to scatter the moment the chancel door is left. And then an adjournment to the field adjoining the churchyard was made, and there was a series of races, all on foot to be run for the ribbons which were the gifts of the several brides; and as some of them gave more than one, the races were multiplied accordingly . . . More than once, too. I have known when the bride in some way incurred the suspicion of niggardness, through not complying with the recognised usage of supplying one ribbon at least, to be run for, the 'stithy was fired upon her' i.e. a charge of powder was rammed into the hole in the anvil (much after a shot in a mine) and fired in derision: well pronounced, if the loudness of the report counted for anything, as the wedding party passed on the way home from the church. The direct converse of this was the firing of guns as the party passed the residences of friends and well-wishers. The race still lingers on, and only a week or two since the bride gave 'Two ribbons to be run for'; and a few years ago one young chap, fleet of foot, and with as much inclination for 'larking' (playing) as for sticking to work — some folks said more — was quoted as the fortunate winner of almost enough to start an itinerant haberdasher in trade.

An editor's footnote in Strutt's *Sports and Pastimes of the People of England*, which carried this quote from Canon Atkinson's book, added some startling spice to the story: an old parishioner of Danby swore that he had seen 'a stark naked race of young men over the moors from Danby-in-Cleveland Churchyard at the conclusion of a wedding at which Canon Atkinson officiated in the year 1851'. Needless to say, added the editor, the sport did not

begin till after the rector had left: 'I had some interesting correspondence with the Canon on this subject, and was able to convince him by the evidence of several that this occasional stripping for a race after a wedding was only abandoned soon after he entered on his incumbency.'

There doesn't appear to have been much nakedness at Highland weddings of this period, but the firing of guns was very much a part of the ritual. According to a splendidly detailed account written by John Hay Allan, Esq., for Hone's *Table Book* (1827), the approach of a Highland bridegroom was announced 'at a distance by a continual and running discharge of fire-arms from his party. These signals are answered by the friends of the bride, and when at length they meet, a general but irregular feu-de-joie announces the arrival.' When the bridegroom lived a day's march away from the bride's home, and his party did not arrive till nightfall, the scene was even more spectacular, 'the plaintive pealing of the pipes approaching upon the stillness of the night, the fire-arms flashing upon the darkness, and their reports redoubled by the solitary echoes of the mountains, and when at length the train draws near, the mingled tread of hasty feet, and full clamour of the pipes, the mixed and confused visionry of the white figures of the girls, and the dark shadows of the men, with here and there the waving of a plaid and the glinting of a dirk'.

The number and quality of the guests each side could attract to the wedding was a matter of pride — everyone from the laird to the lowliest villager was pressured to attend, and to attend in the greatest magnificence he could muster. 'Girls, who the yester even were seen bare-headed and bare-footed, lightly dressed in a blue flannel petticoat and dark linen jacket, are now busked in white frocks, riband sashes, cotton stockings on their feet, and artificial flowers on their heads. The "merchant's" and the miller's daughters frequently exhibit the last fashion from Edinburgh, and are beautified and garnished with escalloped trimmings, tabbed sleeves, tucks, lace, gathers,

and French frills! As it has been discovered that tartan is nothing esteemed in London, little or none is to be seen, except in the red plaid or broached tunic of some old wife, whose days of gayety are past, but who still loves that with which she was gay in her youth.' Even the men mostly wore 'lowland fashion', though those who appeared in the 'noble dress of their ancestors' were always treated as 'an honour and ornament to the day'.

Bride and bridegroom each entertained their own fine supporters to mid-day feasts at their own houses (often the partitions were taken down to make room for the gathering), and the tressels sagged under the weight of 'barley broth, or cock-a-leeky, boiled fowls, roasted ducks, joints of meat, sheep's heads, oat and barley cakes, butter, and cheeses; and in summer, frothed buttermilk, and slam. In the glens where goats are kept, haunches of these animals and roasted kids are also added to the feast.' And all the while (and for two hours before) the 'uisga' (or whisky) bottle circulated: 'each empties a bumper as it passes'. As soon as the bridegroom's feast was done, his party set out for the bride's home with the pipers before it and fire-arms at the ready. At the end of the journey, more whisky and more food greeted the travellers; then the two parties combined — no matter what time of day or night it had become — to march upon the church. The bride linked arms with an appointed bridesmaid and bridesman, a white scarf festooned from the one to the other across her body; and, bringing up the very rear of what must have been an awesome procession, there were always two young girls, with another white scarf festooned between them. The bagpipes skirled out *Fye, lets a' to the Bridal*, and the party moved off. The chapel ceremony was short and very simple, but often held impressively by candlelight. Afterwards, the celebrations continued at a nearby inn or the house of a relative, as it was considered unlucky for a bride's own house to be the first she entered after her wedding. The bridesmaid and bridesman broke an oat cake over her head as she crossed the threshold; then reels

and strathspeys — and the regular passing of the whisky bottle — filled the gap till supper, to which each male guest escorted the lady of his choice and paid for her meal as well as his own.

The bride and groom were allowed to retire for a few hours, but most of the guests kept the dancing going till dawn, when a breakfast of tea, 'multitudes of eggs, cold meat, a profusion of oat cakes, barley "scones", and sometimes *wheat bread*' was provided for the stayers. The bride then prepared to leave for her husband's home, accompanied by her family and neighbours to the border of her father's land, or that of the 'tacksman' he lived under. There, at the burn-side (for the boundaries were usually formed by streams), they danced a parting reel; the bride kissed all her friends, and then marched away into the distance with her new kinsfolk and neighbours. 'When, however, the circumstances of the bridegroom will permit,' wrote Mr. Allan, 'all those who were present at the house of the bride, are generally invited to accompany her on her way, and a renewal of the preceding festivities takes place at the dwelling of the bridegroom.' Thus turning the whole thing into a nightmare marathon. The account ends with the logistics of a wedding at which two 14-year-old bridesmaids, by the time they reached the bridegroom's house, had walked thirty-one miles in two days, and danced all the intervening night.

A little earlier in the century, Benjamin Malkin returned from a *Tour of South Wales* convinced that anyone who met a wedding on the road there would be 'inclined to suppose that he had fallen in with a company of lunatics escaped from their confinement. It is the custom of the whole party who are invited, both men and women, to ride full speed to the church-porch; and the person who arrives there first has some privilege or distinction at the marriage-feast. To this important object all inferior considerations give way, whether the safety of his Majesty's subjects, who are not going to be married, or

their own, be incessantly endangered by boisterous, unskilful, and contentious jockeyship.'

How spiritless these hot-blooded northerners and Celts must have thought the southern English with their pretty little country church weddings, the bride neatly turned out in white or pale grey with artificial orange blossom round her bonnet, and the bridegroom in a countryman's smock, embroidered for him by the bride herself in the traditional pattern of the district. Even penny weddings had disappeared, though, according to W. T. Marchant (in a charming little book full of bridal gossip, called *Betrothals and Bridals, with a chat about wedding cakes & wedding customs*, 1879): 'In some of the rural parts of this country it is usual to fix a floral rope across the street on the day of a wedding; all who pass through on that day have to pay toll.' In many corners of the country, even the simplest wedding was too costly for some villagers, as Richard Meinertzhagen discovered when his family went to live at Mottisfont Abbey in the Test Valley in the 1880s. In his book *Diary of a Black Sheep*, he tells how his mother (the former Miss Georgina Potter) was asked to tidy up the long-established habit of 'living in sin' in that corner of England:

When we first went to Mottisfont many of the villagers were living together as man and wife without having been through the ceremony of marriage. This practice was deemed perfectly honourable, but it shocked the new rector, Mr. Slocock, who consulted my mother on the subject. My mother was a practical woman, always facing facts and, of course, saw the comic side of it. She rather enjoyed the honest and practical manner in which a village can manage its own affairs without the help of the Church, but Slocock being an orthodox priest was outraged at promiscuous living in sin (hateful expression) in his parish. The people of Mottisfont were not immoral and this marriage without ceremony was partly due to Church neglect and partly due to poverty. It was the fate of old couples who, as young people, had been unable to afford the marriage fee of half a crown. Under Mr. Slocock's persuasion, my mother offered to pay

the fee and many old couples nearing the stage of a golden wedding became respectably married.

Wife selling, that other instance of the populace calmly taking the laws of land and church into their own hands, was still going on, too. Thomas Hardy, in 1886, set the story of *The Mayor of Casterbridge* round the selling of a wife at a fair and the retribution which followed; and, according to Robert Chambers, a good deal of surprise and resentment was felt in Yorkshire in 1837 when a man was sentenced to a month's imprisonment at the West Riding Sessions for selling, or attempting to sell, his wife, 'the right to do this being believed in more extensively than we are apt to imagine'. In 1815 a man auctioned his wife in Pontefract, offering her at a minimum bidding of one shilling, and finally knocking her down for eleven. In 1820, a man named Brouchet led his wife into the cattle-market at Canterbury, and when the auctioneer refused to handle her, took a cattle stall for the price of 6d. and sold her from it for five shillings. A Birmingham woman, sold for the handsome sum of £15 in 1834, had the satisfaction of outliving both husbands, marrying for a third time, and inheriting from her first husband's estate, despite strong competition from his relations. The *Annual Register* for 1832 gave a fascinating account of a Carlisle wife-sale which took place in April of that year (quoted in Chambers' *Book of Days*). Having been miserably married for three years, Joseph Thomson, a farmer, took his wife to Carlisle, where he had the bellman announce around the town that he was about to sell her. At noon he stood her on a chair with a halter of rope or straw around her neck and let fly with enough invective to put off, one would have thought, the most willing buyer:

Gentlemen, I have to offer to your notice my wife, Mary Anne Thomson, otherwise Williams, whom I mean to sell to the highest and fairest bidder. Gentlemen, it is her wish as well as mine to part for ever. She has been to me only a born serpent. I took her for my comfort, and the good of my

home; but she became my tormentor, a domestic curse, a night invasion, and a daily devil. Gentlemen, I speak truth from my heart when I say — may God deliver us from troublesome wives and frolicsome women! Avoid them as you would a mad dog, a roaring lion, a loaded pistol, cholera morbus, Mount Etna, or any other pestilential thing in nature. Now I have told you her faults and failings, I will introduce the bright and sunny side of her, and explain her qualifications and goodness. She can read novels and milk cows; she can laugh and weep with the same ease that you could take a glass of ale when thirsty ... She can make butter and scold the maid; she can sing Moore's melodies, and plait her frills and caps; she cannot make rum, gin, or whisky, but she is a good judge of the quality from long experience in tasting them. I therefore offer her with all her perfections and imperfections, for the sum of fifty shillings.

The anti-sell worked: 'after waiting about an hour, Thomson knocked down the lot to one Henry Mears, for twenty shillings and a Newfoundland dog; they then parted in perfect good temper — Mears and the woman going one way, Thomson and the dog another.'

Unfortunately, added Chambers, 'the occasional instances of wife-sale, while remarked by ourselves with little beyond a passing smile, have made a deep impression on our continental neighbours, who seriously believe that it is a habit of all classes of our people, and constantly cite it as an evidence of our low civilisation.'

Across the Atlantic another British habit — though a less serious one — also caused regret. Mrs. Sherwood, the etiquette expert, was not at all happy with the way wedding favours, of 'white ribbon and artificial flowers', were still widely distributed. In America, she was pleased to report, such ornaments were reserved 'for the horse's ears and the servants' coats ... the groom wears a boutonniere of natural flowers'.

At royal weddings most of the guests and the cheering spectators, both men and women, provided their own favours (like those at Queen Victoria's marriage, some

of which were of huge dimensions' with branches rather than sprigs of orange blossom). The bridegroom usually wore a white rosette on his dark frockcoat when he left for his honeymoon, and for the ceremony itself, both he and his chief supporters wore large flat bows of white satin ribbon over each shoulder, attached to the epaulettes of their uniforms. The horses in royal wedding processions did not wear favours, but they were themselves of a suitably festive colour — 'I drove in a sort of state coach with many windows & 4 of the Creams', wrote Queen Victoria after the wedding of her grandson, the Duke of York. (The 'sort of state coach with many windows' was one of the first royal glass coaches.) The other principal performers and guests at this wedding rode in open landaus — also drawn by four cream horses apiece — and this was the type of carriage most often used at other upper-class but non-royal weddings. William Francis Freelove (in *An Assemblage of 19th Century Horses & Carriages*) said that on such important occasions they were often driven by a postilion sitting ceremonially in the saddle of the lead horse, rather than from the coachman's box; and that the whips were decorated with white bows, while the horses 'were bedecked with white ear coverings and white tassels'. ('Could this', suggests a friend who delights in the absurd, 'be the origin of the expression "cloth ears"?')

This was the century when royal weddings went public, and gathered a wealth of new glories along the way. The most important marriage of the early years was that of the heir presumptive, Princess Charlotte of Wales, daughter of the Prince Regent (later George IV). Loathing her mother, the Regent was not over-fond of the daughter, and tried to marry her off to the Prince of Orange, an unprepossessing young man, whose main virtue, in the Regent's eyes, was that he would desire his wife to live in Holland. The 17-year-old Princess, who had somehow managed to grow up with a great deal of character (and

most of it good), refused to agree to the match unless the stipulation that she should not be forced to live abroad against her will was written into the marriage settlement: 'My reasons', she wrote to her uncle, the Duke of York, 'arise no less from personal feeling, than from a sense of personal duty.' After this show of spirit, the Princess became a virtual prisoner until the spring of 1816, when another suitor appeared, a minor German prince, Leopold of Saxe-Coburg, who 'had many good qualities as well as good looks'. He was acceptable, if nothing more, to all parties, and soon the evening of 2 May 1816, the Princess was married at Carlton House, her father's London residence, wearing a wreath of roses and a silver gown which managed to look both magnificent and pretty (and which can still be seen at the London Museum). A few days later, a drawing-room was held in her honour at Buckingham House, as Buckingham Palace was called before the Regent commissioned Nash to turn it into a palace fit for a king. Princess Charlotte's short marriage was almost magically happy; but nineteen months later it came suddenly to an end: the Princess died on 5 November 1817, a few hours after giving birth to a still-born son.

The double death of the heir presumptive and her child left the royal family in an embarrassing situation. Although George III and Queen Charlotte had seven middle-aged sons (and six daughters) living, these royal princes could not now produce a single legitimate heir between the lot of them. The Duke of York, a model of decorum compared with his brothers, had married the Princess Frederica of Prussia in 1791, but there were no children of the union; Augustus, Duke of Sussex, had married twice — once in Rome and once in St. George's, Hanover Square — and had a 23-year-old son, but as the lady concerned (she was the same at both ceremonies) was not of royal blood and as the Duke had failed to ask the King's prior permission, the marriages had long since been declared illegal; the son (and his younger sister) were

therefore deemed illegitimate. Ernest Augustus, the 46-year-old Duke of Cumberland, George III's fifth son, had been married only one year, and was not to produce a legitimate child until 1819. The three remaining brothers were nominally bachelors, and as such were pressured into speedy marriages with German princesses of promising fecundity. Queen Charlotte did the match-making, and managed to get all three off her hands by the summer of 1818. The 44-year-old Duke of Cambridge, the seventh son, was first to go: he married Princess Augusta of Hesse-Cassel, at Cassel on 7 May (and again in London on 1 June); the Duke of Kent, 51, the fourth son, was despatched to Coburg three weeks later, where he married a 32-year-old widow, Victoria Mary Louisa, daughter of the Duke of Saxe-Saalfeld-Coburg, at a Lutheran ceremony. The most senior of this mature trio, the 52-year-old William, Duke of Clarence, was matched with the sweet-natured, 25-year-old Princess Adelaide of Saxe-Meiningen.

The Hanoverians had always been boorish bridegrooms, waiting in their palaces for their brides to come to them, but the Duke of Clarence excelled them all. He was out of town when his bride and her mother arrived, and they were greeted by no more august a personage than the proprietor of the hotel in Albemarle Street at which they were to stay. A messenger was sent to inform the Duke, who duly drove up Piccadilly in a coach and four an hour or so later. The marriage took place very quietly at Kew (a favourite retreat of Queen Charlotte's) on 18 July 1818, and they were joined by the Duke and Duchess of Kent, who took the opportunity of going through the Church of England ceremony with them. After a family dinner and tea at a cottage in the grounds of Kew Palace, the Duke of Clarence drove his bride and her mother to his bachelor apartments in the Stable Yard of St. James's Palace. Next day, the Duchess of Saxe-Meiningen returned to Germany, and the new Duchess of Clarence was left to cope alone, not only with an unwilling bridegroom, twenty-seven years her senior, but also with the ten

children of his liaison with the actress Mrs. Jordan, who had died two years earlier. (This whole pride of princes was notoriously short of cash, and as Mrs. Jordan had continued to work during her relationship with the Duke of Clarence, the wags had all asked whether the Duke was keeping Mrs. Jordan, or Mrs. Jordan was keeping the Duke?) Princess Adelaide had been chosen by Queen Charlotte on her 'reputation for amiability' and she must have had this in marvellous measure: she charmed her husband; charmed his children ('the saving angel of the family', they called her); charmed the country when the Duke became William IV, the sailor king; and, after the bitter loss of two baby daughters of her own, wrote charming letters to the daughter of the Duke and Duchess of Kent, who had shared her wedding day. And that daughter was to become Queen Victoria.

With the marriage of this young Queen in 1840 the pattern of royal weddings began to change. The first alteration was fortuitous rather than planned: she chose to be married in the Chapel Royal of St. James's Palace, scene of most royal weddings of the previous century, but as she did not live at St. James's like her predecessors (Victoria was the first monarch to make the newly refurbished and titled Buckingham Palace her official home) she had a short journey to make on her wedding day, a journey which could be watched and shared in by her subjects, and which turned the occasion into a public event. Another novelty had been the emphasis placed on the desires of the bride when it came to choosing a husband. The match-making was still there, but it had become more subtle — there was to be no more parental bullying to take a life-partner sight-unseen. Prince Albert was brought to the notice of the future Queen a year before her accession, when she was just 17, and Albert (three months her junior) had not quite reached that elevated estate. He, his elder brother Ernest, and their father the Duke of Coburg, took an English holiday in the spring of 1836, staying part of the time with the Princess and her

mother, the Duchess of Kent, at Kensington Palace. When they left, Victoria wrote in her Journal: 'I cried very very bitterly after my dear beloved cousins had left. Dearly as I love Ferdinand, and also good Augustus, I love Ernest and Albert more than them, oh yes, *much* more . . .' (Albert wrote in his diary: 'She is very amiable and extraordinarily self-possessed!') Before the parting, the Princess and the Duke acknowledged that a marriage might take place. Albert was not told, but a gruelling course of education was mapped out (largely by King Leopold of the Belgians) to fit him for the role. King Leopold, Victoria's uncle (her mother's brother), played constant Svengali to the match, and he was in a particularly good position to know what was needed in a consort for a queen of England, for he was the same Leopold, the minor German prince, who had been married for so tragically short a time to Princess Charlotte. Since those days, Leopold had advanced in the world, turning down an offer of the throne of Greece in 1831, and accepting that of Belgium a year later.

Prince Albert was still deep in his studies when King William IV of Britain died in June 1837, and Victoria became Queen; he did not appear in England again until the autumn of 1839, and by that time the 20-year-old sovereign was greatly enjoying her new role — and her new freedom. The girl who only two years earlier had still been sleeping in her mother's bedroom and was forbidden to walk downstairs without someone to hold her hand, was now the crowned head of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland. Romance and Albert had a lot to compete with. Shortly before Prince Albert and his brother arrived for this second visit, the Queen described in her journal a conversation she had had that day with her Prime Minister, Lord Melbourne: 'Talked of my cousins Ernest and Albert coming over — of my having no great wish to see Albert, as the whole subject was an odious one which I hated to decide about; there was no

engagement between us, I said, but the young man was aware there was a possibility of such a union.'

One look at Albert, and all such sniffy superiority vanished: 'At ½ past 7 I went to the top of the staircase and received my 2 dear cousins, Ernest and Albert — whom I found grown and changed and embellished . . . It was with some emotion I beheld Albert — who is *beautiful*.' That was 10 October. On the 12th, the Queen: 'Talked of Spain with Lord M . . . Talked of my cousins . . . the length of their stay being left to me; and I said seeing them had a good deal changed my opinion as to marrying, and that I must decide soon, which was a difficult thing . . .' On Monday the 14th: 'Talked of my cousins having gone out shooting. After a little pause I said to Lord M. I had made up my mind (about marrying dearest Albert) — "You have?" he said . . . "I'm very glad of it; I think it is a good thing, you'll be much more comfortable; for a woman cannot stand alone for long, in whatever situation she is." . . . Then I asked if I hadn't better call Albert of my decision soon, in which Lord M. agreed. "How?" I asked, for in general such things are done the other way round. Which made Lord M. laugh . . .'

Next day: 'Saw my dear Cousins come home quite safe from the hunt . . . At about ½ p. 12 I sent for Albert . . . After a few minutes I said to him that I thought he must be aware *why* I wished him to come — and that it would make me *too* happy if he would consent to what I wished (to marry me). We embraced each other, and he was *so* kind and *so* affectionate. There was no hesitation on his part. He is perfect in every way . . .'

'It was a nervous thing to do,' she said later, 'but Prince Albert could not possibly have proposed to the Queen of England. He would never have presumed to take such a liberty.' At the time, she wrote in her Journal: ' "I have got well through this with Albert," I said to Lord M.'

Greater ordeals lay ahead. Not only did the young Queen have to do the proposing and consult with her Prime Minister on the progress of her romance, but it was

also her job to inform the Privy Council ('I wore a beautiful bracelet with the prince's picture and it seemed to give me courage . . . I felt my hand shake but I did not make a mistake') and, later, Parliament. (Lord Melbourne and his Monarch looked up the records of how George III had coped with such a situation, since he was another youthful sovereign who had married shortly after accession, and followed this precedent.) On 16 January 1840 Queen Victoria opened a new session of Parliament, announcing her proposed marriage at the beginning of her speech from the throne. The following day she was able to write to Albert: 'Everything went off exceedingly well yesterday. There was an immense multitude of people, and perhaps never, certainly not for a long time, have I been received so well; and what is remarkable *I was not nervous*, and read the speech really well.'

Her ministers, however, were not handling things so deftly. They failed to make clear that the Prince was a Protestant even though rumours were flying about, on the one hand that he was a Roman Catholic, and, on the other, that he was 'a radical and an infidel'; they tried to railroad the House into granting him the sum of £50,000 a year (even after admitting the cost of his household would not be more than £7,000 and despite 'great commercial distress' in the country); and they attempted to slip the tricky question of 'precedence' into the naturalisation bill, which caused an ungracious delay in inviting the Prince to become a British subject. The English constitution makes no provision for male consorts; each case is worked out afresh as it arises, and usually provokes a surprising amount of bad feeling before it is settled. Queen Victoria wished to make Albert her 'King-Consort', saying that she did not want him to be in the same position as that 'stupid and insignificant husband of Queen Anne'. As in the case of a Queen Consort, he would then have been of undisputed rank, next only to herself. But the Opposition said, 'What? Have precedence over the Prince of Wales, the heir to the throne, when there is one?

And what if the Queen died young? Would he then take precedence over *everyone*?' In the end the Whigs had to drop the over-heated issue in order to get the naturalisation part of the bill through in time for the wedding. It was not until seventeen years later that the Prince-Consort, who had long since been given that title by public acclaim, had it conferred on him by Royal Letters Patent, and in the meantime there were many uncomfortable moments, especially abroad, when any protocol-crazed little Archduke could claim precedence over the husband of the Queen of England, 'merely', as Queen Victoria wrote, 'because the English law did not know of him'. His rank, to anyone who wanted to be nasty about it, remained that of a younger son of the ducal house of Saxe-Coburg and Gotha.

Queen Victoria and Prince Albert did so much to stabilise the British crown and rub up an image heavily tarnished by the sons of George III that it is easy to forget to what a low ebb royalty had sunk when she first came to the throne. At the time of her wedding, the newspapers and magazines were delighted to hint that the young Queen was fully as badly-behaved as her relations, and gave generous space to 'the rumours abroad' that the elderly charmer, Lord Melbourne, 'will, of course, be retiring after the marriage'. Even her bridal wardrobe came under attack in a letter from 'a dressmaker' to *The Times* four days before the ceremony:

> The papers constantly announce that the dresses of Her Majesty's Court are composed wholely of British manufacture . . . This assertion is wholely unfounded. Her Majesty's dress makers and milliners are foreigners and no other find favour at Court . . . I am told that five of Her Majesty's vans were loaded at the Customs House . . . I believe it is also understood that Her Majesty's dress is to be Brussels Lace instead of Honiton Lace though Honiton Lace has been purchased as a blind.

The Court Newsman was later to stress that the wedding

dress was of white Spitalfields satin 'with a very deep trimming of Honiton lace, a design similar to that of the veil. The body and sleeves were richly trimmed with the same material to correspond. The train was of white satin and was also lined with white satin trimmed with orange blossom . . . exclusively of British Fabrication.' Details of the guests' *ensembles* also included 'exclusively of British fabrication', in brackets, where appropriate.

Although Victoria's wedding clothes were costly, they were far simpler than those of her predecessors; silver brocade, encrusted with jewels, was out, and she was the first British monarch to be married without a heavy velvet and ermine royal mantle. Having described her bridal *toilette* (rich by our standards, certainly), *The Times* reported: 'Her attendants were arrayed with similar simplicity.' The lace she wore *was* made at Honiton (or, to be absolutely precise, at the village of Beer nearby); it cost £1,000 and was worked by 'two hundred poor lace workers' who 'could not sufficiently express their gratitude.' During the Queen's lifetime, most of this truly exquisite lace was taken off the dress (to be worn on many other occasions) and replaced with something a little less expensive. The gown itself, with the original lace Bertha and sleeve flounces, plus the substitute lace, can still be seen at the London Museum — which is quartered in Kensington Palace, the birthplace of Victoria, and the home of her youth. It is a lovely, tiny dress (the Queen was only 4 ft. 11 in. tall), with a low neck and very pretty sleeves, gathered into two puffs, above the elbow. The bodice is deeply pointed at the waist, the skirt pleated and full — though not monstrously so; crinolines had not yet become the fashion. The veil was only one-and-a-half yards square. She also wore diamond earrings and necklace, and the insignia of the Order of the Garter. The Dowager Lady Lyttelton, one of the Ladies in Waiting, wrote a few days after the ceremony: 'The Queen's look and manner were very pleasing; her eyes much swollen with tears, but great happiness in her countenance; and her look of confidence

and comfort at the Prince, when they walked away as man and wife, was very pleasing to see. I understand she is in extremely high spirits since. Such a new thing for her to *dare* to be *unguarded* in conversing with anybody; and with her frank and fearless nature the restraints she had hitherto been under, from one reason or another, with everybody, must have been most painful.'

Lord Malmesbury recorded that the Queen's uncle, the Duke of Sussex (of the clandestine marriages) had given her away — 'and the "John Bull" says that he is always ready to give away what does not belong to him. There were only two Tories present at the ceremony, the Duke of Wellington and Lord Liverpool. The Queen was very much cheered by the mob on her way to and from the chapel.' (The Queen had earlier vowed that she would not invite 'a single Tory' to the wedding, as punishment for the way they had argued over Prince Albert's allowance and precedence. She had obviously been persuaded to make two exalted exceptions.)

The bridegroom had also been very much cheered by the mob on his journey to London. Earlier, there had been grumbles that he was too young and that Britain had had enough of German princes, anyway; but when he landed at Dover, four days before the wedding, his handsome looks and youthful dignity won over the country as they had won over the Queen, and he was cheered all the way to London. He arrived at Buckingham Palace on 8 February, taking the oaths which made him a British subject the same day — 'He looked superbly handsome', wrote the bride. The following day she made him a Knight of the Garter, and he wore the collar of the order on his wedding day, over the uniform of a Field Marshal of the British Army. Round the left knee of his skin-tight white breeches was the garter itself, and on each epaulette was a large bridal bow of white satin ribbon. (The Duke of Sussex, an imposing figure of a man, much girt about with collars and decorations, also appears, from Sir George Hayter's official painting of the marriage ceremony, to

have sported wedding favours — in this case, a white rosette on each shoulder.) The Dowager Queen Adelaide wore a white gown with a train of violet velvet, lined with white satin, and on her head feathers and a diamond tiara. The bride's mother, the Duchess of Kent, also wore feathers and diamonds and a veil, but less illustrious guests were instructed by the Court Circular, on the morning of the wedding, that 'the exclusion of feathers is particularly desirable as they would interfere with the view of the passing scene'. White wedding favours were, specifically, permitted to everyone, and the day after the marriage *The Times* reported: 'Every lady exhibited a white favour, some of which were admirable specimens of refined taste. They were of all sizes, many of white satin riband, tied up into bows and mixed with layers of rich silver lace. Others merely of riband intermixed with sprigs of orange flower blossoms . . . here and there were seen bouquets of huge dimensions of riband and massive silver bullion having in their centre what might almost be termed a branch of orange blossoms. Large as they were, however, they were not more so than the apparent devotion of their owners.'

After a family wedding breakfast at Buckingham Palace, the royal bride and groom prepared to leave for a brief honeymoon at Windsor Castle, Prince Albert changing into 'a plain dark travelling dress and H.M. in a white satin pelisse trimmed with swansdown, with a white satin bonnet and feather' (*The Times*). 'Dearest Albert came up and fetched me downstairs,' the Queen wrote in her Journal, 'when we took leave of Mamma and drove off near 4; I and Albert alone . . .' But not for long: Mamma and the Duke of Coburg visited them two days later, and on the 14 February, the 20-year-old Queen and her 20-year-old Consort returned to London. On the 19th Her Majesty held a *levée*, and the Prince stood at her left hand.

The day after her wedding, the Queen wrote to Baron Stockmar: 'There cannot exist a dearer, purer, nobler

being in the world than the Prince'; they were sentiments which were not to fade.

Queen Victoria, like her great-great-granddaughter, Queen Elizabeth II, was all for marriage, when it was her own she was thinking of; but, like Queen Elizabeth I, felt much abused when any of her household decided to take the plunge. In May 1842, she had obviously been grumbling to Lord Melbourne about the engagement of one of her Maids of Honour, Susan Cavendish, to Lord Emlyn, for the good Lord M. gave her an unmistakable wigging in his letter of 15 May: '. . . Your Majesty having generally chosen handsome and attractive girls for the Maids of Honour, which is very right, must expect to lose them in this way. Lord Melbourne is very glad of the marriage. Lord Emlyn always seemed to him a very pleasing young man, and well calculated to make a woman happy.' In her widowhood she was even more put out by such marriages and was very angry when her resident physician, Sir James Reid, became engaged to Susan Baring, a Maid of Honour for little more than a year. Lady Lytton (in her *Court Diary*) recorded that the doctor finally 'won round' his august patient 'by promising never to do it again'.

The marriages of her own children, however, were quite a different matter and Queen Victoria worked hard and long to find suitable partners for them; even the 'Baby' of the family, Princess Beatrice (who was only four when the Prince Consort died and was firmly clamped to her mother's side ever after), was allowed to wed, though under somewhat stringent conditions and not until the age of 28. The nine royal children (five girls and four boys) all married in pretty much the same sequence in which they had been born, and it was the eldest of them all, 'Vicky', the Princess Royal, who was the first to go. In January 1858, two months after her 17th birthday, she married Prince Frederick William of Prussia, at the same place — the Chapel Royal of St. James's Palace — and in a ceremony much the same in every respect as that of her mother. She and her husband also spent a brief honey-

moon at Windsor, where they were visited by their parents as Queen Victoria and the Prince Consort had been. But on this occasion everything was a little more grand. That marvellous new invention, the railway, brought royalty from all over Europe to witness the event: Disraeli thought the final gathering included 'as many princes as the Congress of Vienna', while Charles Greville, the diarist, recorded that all went off with 'amazing *éclat*'. *The Times* was struck by the 'exquisite taste' of the floral arrangements and commented on the masses of flowers, leaves and berries which were used. Of the bride's arrival at St. James's it reported: 'The gorgeous veil she wears depending from her headdress is thrown off and, hanging in massive folds behind, leaves the expression of her face completely visible as she walks slowly, her head slightly stooped in bashfulness and her eyes cast down upon the ground.' Her dress was 'so thoroughly in good taste' it was 'difficult to remark anything, save that it is exquisitely becoming, beautiful, and white ... manufactured by Miss Janet Fife and composed of a rich robe of white moire antique, with three flounces of Honiton lace.' In the end, they also managed to remark that the 'train of unusual length of more than three yards is of white moire antique trimmed with two rows of Honiton lace surmounted by wreaths similar to those on the flounces of the dress with bouquets at short intervals'. It was more floral and fussy than her mother's had been, trellised with garlands and wreaths of roses, shamrocks and thistles. On her head she wore a wreath of orange blossom and myrtle.

The bridesmaids — eight maiden daughters of dukes, marquises and earls, a selection which was to be followed at most future royal weddings — wore frothy dresses designed by the bride herself. All had six deep tulle flounces, looped up with bouquets of roses and white heather — the latter said (by the *Illustrated London News*) to have been 'modelled from a sprig of heather which the Princess gathered during her last walk in the

mountains near her Highland home'. The bridegroom 'wore the dark blue uniform of Prussian Service, and over his breast the orange ribbon of the order of the Black Eagle'. Lord Malmesbury, a man with a dry sense of humour, noticed that the *Morning Post* had Lord Palmerston (the Prime Minister) carrying the sword of State 'with an easy grace and dignity', while *The Times* thought 'with a ponderous solemnity'.

There had been some rumours in Germany that the wedding might take place there, but Queen Victoria instructed her Foreign Secretary, Lord Clarendon, to tell the British Minister at Berlin not to '*entertain* the *possibility* of such a question . . . The Queen *never* would consent to it . . . the assumption of its being *too much* for a Prince Royal of Prussia to *come* over to marry *the Princess Royal of Great Britain* IN England is too *absurd*, to say the least . . . Whatever may be the usual practice of Prussian Princes it is not *every* day that one marries the eldest daughter of the Queen of England. The question therefore must be considered as settled and closed . . .' And so it was.

The whole of Britain was given a holiday and despite the cold, raw weather, crowds lined the route from Buckingham Palace to St. James's, and were waiting again to watch the departure of the bride and groom for Windsor in the afternoon — and the arrival of the guests for the ball in the evening. There were complaints in the papers about the cost of the wedding in relation to the 'numbers of poor people with no bread' and a suggestion in the letter columns of *The Times* (23 January) that 'the poor in their workhouse should have a meat dinner (instead of soup) and a pint of porter each for their dinner on Monday next in order that they might have cause to rejoice in the auspicious event of the day'. But, on the whole, the country was in good humour, celebrating everywhere to the sound of pealing bells and crackling bonfires.

This was the only wedding of their children at which

both Queen Victoria and her consort were present. In December 1861, Prince Albert died at the age of 42, and the next royal wedding which took place the following year, was a sad affair indeed. The bride was Princess Alice, the second daughter and third child of the Queen. The bridegroom was Prince Louis of Hesse. And they were married, six months after the Prince Consort's death, in the dining-room of Osborne House, on the Isle of Wight. The Queen gave her daughter a Prayer Book 'like one dear Mama gave me on *our* happy wedding morning' and wore deep mourning, with 'my "sad cap", as baby calls it'. Her Majesty surveyed the dining-room before the guests arrived and found it 'very prettily decorated, the altar being placed under our large family picture. All the furniture had been removed, and plants and flowers placed everywhere . . .' The bride wore white lace, the bridegroom a black tail-coat, and the dress worn by the guests (said the *Illustrated London News*) 'was mourning dress; the gentlemen in black evening coats, white waistcoats, grey trousers, and black neck cloths, and the ladies in grey or violet dresses, and grey or white gloves.' The Queen entered with her four sons, sat in an armchair throughout, and had (she wrote in her Journal) 'a great struggle all through, but remained calm'.

The romance had blossomed in happier days. In a letter to her Uncle Leopold (King of the Belgians) in December 1860, a year before Prince Albert's death, Queen Victoria wrote with pleasure of their daughter's engagement (giving, at the same time, a splendid picture of the kind of setting which was then thought ideal for a proposal):

Dearest Uncle, — I hasten to announce to you that yesterday our dear young couple were engaged, and that we *are all* very happy. Louis was spoken to yesterday on our return from Aldershot by Albert, — who told him he would have an opportunity of speaking to Alice — and this opportunity he took last night after dinner when he was standing alone with her at the fire, and every one else was occupied talking. They

whispered it to me, and then, after we left the drawing-room, we sent for good Louis — and the young people met and confirmed in a very touching manner *what* they had merely been able to whisper to one another before. He was very much overcome. He is a dear, good, amiable high-principled young man — who I am sure will make our dearest Alice *very* happy, and she will, I am sure, be a most devoted and loving wife to him. She is *very, very* happy, and it is a pleasure to see their young, happy faces beaming with love for one another

About her eldest son, Albert Edward, Prince of Wales, the Queen could never write with such contentment. 'Bertie' she could not love. Whatever he did was wrong, and even his looks aggravated her: 'Handsome I cannot think him, with that painfully small and narrow head, those immense features and total want of chin', she wrote to her eldest daughter in November 1858. Everyone appears to have agreed that Bertie had better be 'settled' early, with a girl who appealed to him and who had enough character to cope with him, or there would be trouble. As soon as the Princess Royal was married and living in Berlin, the Queen set her scouting all the unmarried princesses of Europe for possible talent, demanding photographs and reports of likely candidates. When the Prince was only 18, *The Times* (5 July 1858) reported that there were seven princesses under consideration, with Princess Alexandra of Denmark fifth on the list. That low rating, if correct, was solely due to politics; Germany and Denmark were baring their teeth at each other and Britain did not want to appear to be taking sides. Other candidates were sought, but Princess Alexandra was so obviously superior to the rest ('She is the most fascinating creature in the world', wrote the Princess Royal), that, in the summer of 1861, a 'casual' meeting was arranged between the Prince of Wales and the Princess of Denmark, in Germany where they were both on holiday. By remarkable coincidence, they both toured the Cathedral at Speier at the same hour on the same day. Next morning, they

chanced to meet again at Heidelberg. Reactions were watched with gimlet-eyes, and reports fired back to Britain. When the Prince of Wales himself returned, his father wrote to Baron Stockmar: 'he has come back greatly pleased with his interview with the princess at Speier.'

But, with the death of the Prince Consort a few months later, the impetus was lost. The proposed marriage of his eldest son was shelved and was only taken down and dusted off again when the news reached Britain of other suitors for the hand of the peerless princess. In the late summer of 1862, after eight months of widowhood, Queen Victoria rallied herself and did '*alone* . . . what, under other, former happy circumstances, had devolved on us both together'. At her Uncle Leopold's palace at Laeken she met Princess Alexandra for the first time ('such a beautiful refined profile, and quiet ladylike manner, which made a most favourable impression'), with her parents, Prince and Princess Christian, and arranged the engagement. 'I said that I trusted their dear daughter would feel, should she accept our son, that she was doing so with her whole heart and will. They assured me that Bertie *might hope* she would do so, and that they trusted *he* also felt a real inclination, adding that they hoped God would give their dear child strength to do what she ought, and that she might be able to pour some comfort into my poor heart.'

The Princess was delighted to do 'what she ought'; indeed, according to Lord Clarendon, she told one of her new sisters-in-law on her wedding day: 'you perhaps think that I like marrying your Brother for his position but if he was a cowboy I shd: love him just the same & wd: marry no one else.' (Sentiments which must have puzzled the young man's mother.) The second day at Laeken, Queen Victoria gave Alexandra 'a little piece of white heather, which Bertie gave me at Balmoral, and told her I hoped it would bring her luck.' Six days later, the Prince of Wales wrote somewhat truculently to his mother, who had, by then, moved on to Reinhardtsbrunn: 'Now I will take a

walk with Princess Alexandra in the garden and in three-quarters of an hour I will take her into the grotto, and there I will propose and I hope it will be to everybody's satisfaction.' The announcement of the engagement stressed that it was 'based on mutual affection and the personal merits of the young princess', and was 'in no way connected with political considerations'.

The marriage celebrations in March 1863 were very grand indeed. The royal yacht, the *Victoria and Albert*, was sent for the bride and her family (the brides of British princes were no longer packed off alone to meet their destiny, though this still happened on the Continent). Three days before the wedding on the morning of 7 March, the Thames estuary was almost solid with small craft, as the yacht, dressed over all, and escorted by battleships, docked at Queenborough near Gravesend. The Lords of the Admiralty were there to greet her — and so was the bridegroom. A great cheer went up as he stepped aboard and kissed his bride on deck, in full view of the waiting crowds. Sixty girls in Danish colours scattered spring flowers in Princess Alexandra's path as she came ashore. A bouquet was handed to her, and the Mayor, Corporation and Town Clerk presented a welcoming address; the Princess replied in English 'as pure as if she had been born and bred in England'. The chairman and directors of the Chatham and Dover Railway were in personal charge of the special train which took the royal party to London; cheering crowds packed every station and flags sprouted even from the haystacks along the line. At the Bricklayer's Arms, Southwark, the party transferred to open carriages for a triumphant drive through London to Windsor. 'Welcome Rose of Denmark', 'Welcome to your new home' read the arches over the streets; London Bridge was flanked by gigantic effigies of every king of Denmark including the reigning sovereign; and, despite the rain, huge crowds — every man, woman and child of them with a wedding favour — thronged the route. 'The first Danish conquest came with fire and sword,' rhapsodised the news-

papers, 'but this one comes with the mightier power of love.' Alfred, Lord Tennyson saluted the bride:

> Sea-king's daughter as happy as fair,
> Blissful bride of a blissful heir,
> Bride of the heir of the kings of the Sea.

The wedding took place in St. George's Chapel, Windsor — the first royal marriage to be solemnised there since that of the Black Prince in 1361. Over 900 guests were invited; foreign royalty once more crowded in from all over Europe; all the diplomatic corps, and all the Knights of the Garter (in their robes) were there. The day, 10 March, was a national holiday and the route from Castle to Chapel was crowded with sightseers; bare-foot urchins sold wedding programmes at a penny a time; Eton boys in shiny top-hats and bum-freezers looked on superciliously. At noon the processions began to form up. First of all the clergy: the Archbishop of Canterbury was always the chief star on these occasions, assisted by many a Bishop and Dean. The royal guests who had no actual part to play in the ceremony were next to leave the Castle, with their various suites, in the long line of carriages; then the Queen, wearing her weeds, 'but a silk gown with crape, a long veil to my cap, and, for the first time since December '61, the ribbon, star, and badge of the Order of the Garter, the latter being one my beloved one had worn, also the Victoria and Albert Order, on which I have had dearest Albert's head put above mine, and a brooch containing a miniature of him set round with diamonds, which I have worn even since '40.' With members of her household she entered the Royal Closet through a side door, and from there could see the whole Chapel: 'full of smartly dressed people, the Knights of the Garter in their robes, the waving banners, the beautiful window, altar, and reredos to my beloved one's memory, with the bells ringing outside, quite had the effect of a scene in a play.' The Queen, who was a spectator only on this emotion-charged occasion, watched her family arrive: the three

younger daughters, all in mauve and white; her second daughter, Princess Alice of Hesse 'looking extremely well in a violet dress, covered with her wedding lace, and a violet train, from the shoulders trimmed with the miniver beloved Mama had worn at Vicky's wedding'; and then 'Vicky' herself, the Princess Royal, 'in a white satin dress trimmed with ermine . . . (leading little William)'. Little William, then aged four, was to grow into Kaiser William II. It is nice to think that for the marriage of his British uncle, he was kitted out in full, if miniature, Highland dress.

Queen Victoria, who would have made an excellent reporter, recorded all this in her Journal on the night of the wedding. For the arrival of the bridegroom, she supplied an appropriately dramatic introduction: 'There was a pause, and then the trumpets sounded again, and our boy, supported by Ernest C [*Coburg, elder brother of the Prince Consort*] and Fritz [*the Crown Prince of Prussia, married to the Princess Royal*], all in Garter robes, entered; Bertie looking pale and nervous. He bowed to me, and during the long wait for his Bride kept constantly looking up at me, with an anxious, clinging look, which touched me much. At length she appeared, the band playing Handel's Processional March, with her eight Bridesmaids, looking very lovely. She was trembling and very pale.'

Lord Clarendon, father of one of the bridesmaids, also described the scene, for the beautiful Duchess of Manchester. As always with these events there were people everyone thought should have been invited who weren't, and people who were invited that everyone thought should not have been. The Disraelis were only asked at the last moment, and Lord Malmesbury, a former Foreign Secretary, was left permanently out in the cold. The Duchess of Manchester, who had been Mistress of the Robes to Queen Victoria, was another who could reasonably have expected an invitation which never came. Her friends, angry and amazed, dashed off high-spirited ac-

counts of the day in compensation, as soon as they got home. (Thus making the Duchess's loss, our gain.) According to Lord Clarendon: 'The P: of Wales waited for The Pss: more than 10 minutes at the altar wh: was rather trying & people began to wonder if the Bride was coy & to hope she had not changed her mind. However she came at last with an enormous long train held up by the 8 b:maids who were a nice looking lot, tho none very pretty except Di Beauclerk. On either side of her were the D: of Cambridge & her Father.' The bride's eyes '& the tip of her nose were a tiny bit red & accounted for by her having cried all the morng: at leaving her mother, for ever, as she must feel'. The Prince of Wales, thought Lord Clarendon, 'in the robes of the Garter looked very like a gentleman & more *considerable* then he is wont to do'.

Lord ('Puss') Granville, another of the Duchess's devoted correspondents, thought the bride's 'dress (in my opinion, but Constance says I am wrong) was too much sunk in the Greenery — covered with too much orange flowers & green leaves'. The Queen wore a wedding favour, he said, and 'The Bridesmaids looked well in their uniform dresses, when their backs were turned. They were hideous when in full view, excepting Lady Di. Beauclerk who looked as if she had just stepped off the stage of the opera.' Lady Palmerston forgot her prayer book: 'Palma Vecchio [*Palmerston*] scrambled over the pews and after extraordinary acrobatic feats brought her three — which she thought at least two more than she required.' (Lord Palmerston was Prime Minister, and 79 years old.)

The *Illustrated London News* gave more detailed descriptions of the clothes:

> The dress of . . . the bride was a petticoat of white satin trimmed with chatelaines of orange-blossoms, myrtle, and bouffants of tulle, with Honiton lace, the train of silver moire antique, trimmed with bouffants of tulle, Honiton lace, and bouquets of orange-blossom and myrtle.
>
> Her Royal Highness wore a veil of Honiton lace, and a wreath of orange-blossom and myrtle.

The eight bridesmaids wore:

... wreaths of ... blush roses, shamrocks and white heather, with long veils of tulle falling from the back of the wreath. The dresses of white tulle over white glacé were trimmed to correspond.

While the Prince of Wales, the bridegroom:

... wore his mantle of the Kt. of the Garter, with white ribands on each shoulder, over his uniform of General in the Army, which was so concealed by the ample folds of the blue and ermine that only a glint of the scarlet tunic and the extremity of his gold-striped overalls, boots and spurs were visible. [*The Prince was the last Royal bridegroom to add the splendour of his Garter robes to such an occasion.*]

A salute was fired at the end of the ceremony, the Queen kissed her hand to the bride; the choir sang Beethoven's *Hallelujah Chorus*, from *The Mount of Olives*, and the bridegroom led the Princess to a waiting carriage. The procession up the hill again to the Castle was wildly cheered, hats were tossed in the air and handkerchiefs waved. One journalist was so carried away by the magnificence of it all, he vowed that the shrubberies of Windsor sprouted nothing but orange blossom and myrtle flowers. The Queen, having taken a short cut home, was there to greet the newly-weds, rushing down the 'Grand Staircase (the first time since my misfortune) where all the Beefeaters were drawn up. My *only* thought was that of welcoming *our children*'. The register was signed in the White Drawing-room, and it 'took a very long time', so many royals having, in courtesy, to be asked to witness the event. A 'family luncheon of thirty-eight' followed (the Queen's favourite, the Maharaja Duleep Singh, was always counted as family at such times); but the Queen herself, widowed scarcely more than a year, and constantly aware that all the 'joy, pride, and happiness'

which had accompanied the Princess Royal's wedding five years earlier, was being repeated '*without* the principal figure of all, the guardian angel of the family, being there', took her lunch with only 5-year-old Princess Beatrice for company. For non-family like Lord Clarendon, 'A magnificent standing luncheon was provided . . . in St. Geo's Hall.' Lord Granville thought there was rather a scramble for it, and the Chancellor 'confided to Lady Shaftesbury that he thought the women (not the chickens) were skinny & boney'.

As the guests dived into the wedding breakfast, the beautiful bride and her considerable rise in fortune were the chief topics of discussion, for, as Clarendon wrote to the Duchess: 'Prince & Pss: Christian have not till quite lately had more than £800 a year pour tout potage & their children tho *very* well educated have been brought up in the simplest manner. What a change for The Alexandra! The P. of W. has expended £3000 in trousseau & £15,000 in jewels — some of the latter are I hear quite beautiful.'

Both royal luncheons finished, Queen Victoria rejoined the family: 'Bertie soon appeared, then darling Alix, looking lovely in a white silk dress, lace shawl, and white bonnet with orange flowers. She was much agitated and affected, and was embraced by all her family who were in tears; then I once more embraced her and Bertie, with feelings I cannot describe, and gave them my warmest blessing.' The Queen then darted from window to window to watch them leave in an open carriage: 'They stopped for a moment under the window, Bertie standing up, and both looking up lovingly at me. Then we hastened to my room, where I saw them drive off, through the enthusiastic crowds.' They were away, in a shower of slippers, to Osborne for a week. (By 17 March they had returned to London, and on the 20th they held court at St. James's Palace.)

Most of the guests returned to London by special train, amidst (so Lord Malmesbury was told) scenes of

considerable confusion: 'The Duchess of Westminster, who had on half a million's worth of diamonds, could only find place in a third-class carriage, and Lady Palmerston was equally unfortunate. Count Lavradio had his diamond star torn off and stolen by the roughs.' At Windsor, the sun had 'shone brilliantly all the time', but Lord Clarendon's servant in London met him with the news that there they had been 'obliged to light candles on acct: of the dense fog . . . It now rains torrents & the illuminations tonight must be swamped.'

Nevertheless, on every high peak in the country a bonfire burned that night; church bells pealed out throughout the land; banquets were held for rich and poor; and many a city was lit up like fairyland.

The marriage of the Prince of Wales set the pattern for the weddings of four more of Queen Victoria's children. The Princesses Helena and Louise, and the Princes Arthur, Duke of Connaught, and Leopold, Duke of Albany, were all married in St. George's Chapel, with only slightly less pomp and fewer guests.

The Queen took a greater part in these later marriages, giving away her daughters, and walking in the processions of all. The carriages started to leave the Castle for the Chapel shortly after noon, the royal guests and their households first, the Queen next, then the bridegroom, and finally the bride, who started for the Chapel at 12.30. All were surrounded by their own suites and were led to their places by heralds in glittering tabards, the Lord Chamberlain, the Vice-Chamberlain, and the Master of Ceremonies. The chief of the royal guests were seated on either side of the *haut pas*, near the altar, and the principals stood in the area between. The ceremony (conducted always by the Archbishop of Canterbury) complete, a salute was fired outside, the bells were rung the choir finished singing, the organ played Mendelssohn's *Wedding March*, and all the procession merged into one for the grand exit. The *Illustrated London News* gave this

departure plan for the wedding of the Duke of Connaught and his Prussian princess:

Herald Herald

Master of Ceremonies

Gentlemen in attendance of H.R.H. the Bride

Members of the German Embassy

H.E. the German Ambassador

Household of H.R.H. the Bridegroom

The Lord Chamberlain The Vice-Chamberlain

THE BRIDE AND BRIDEGROOM

Supporters of their Royal Highnesses

THE QUEEN

With Princess Beatrice and Prince Albert Victor*

The Royal Family and Royal Guests

After the signing of the register, which always took place at the Castle, not the Chapel, the royal family and royal guests sat down to *déjeûner* in the dining-room. There were no speeches, just two toasts: to the Queen, and to the bride and bridegroom. A mounted military escort accompanied 'the happy pair' to the station around 4 p.m. and at both ends of their train journey bouquets were presented and short speeches of farewell/welcome and congratulation made. Towns and villiages through which they drove were festooned with flags and garlanded with flowers. At night there was usually a ball or dinner at Windsor Castle for the royal guests left behind.

Royal honeymoons remained quiet and brief, except for that of the Duke of Connaught: he took his Prussian bride on a two-and-a-half month Mediterranean cruise, taking in Gibraltar, Algiers, Sicily, Malta, Greece, and many another romantic spot, travelling from place to place in a royal yacht called the *Osborne*.

Even when a royal wedding did not take place in Britain,

* Prince Albert Victor — eldest son of the Prince of Wales, later given title Duke of Clarence and Avondale. Died, 14 January 1892, aged 28.

there were celebrations throughout the land: Queen Victoria's second son, Alfred, Duke of Edinburgh, married the Grand Duchess Marie Alexandrovna, only daughter of the Tsar Alexander II ('a just, benevolent, and truly liberal Sovereign') in January 1874, and travelled to St. Petersburg to do so, but the festivities in Britain were almost as great as those for his elder brother, the Prince of Wales, had been. The city of Edinburgh, understandably, put on a special show: the castle and old town being magnificently illuminated and: 'At an early hour in the evening a bonfire, consisting of fifteen tons of railway sleepers soaked in tar, was lit on the summit of Arthur's Seat, and told the district for fifty miles around that Edinburgh was rejoicing.' Bride-cake, as it was called in the newspapers, was distributed in the streets from great wicker baskets.

The Lord Mayor of Liverpool, 'with his characteristic munificence, chose to celebrate this joyful occasion in the good old English fashion, by giving a dinner for the poor.' On the night of the marriage and the one following, he entertained 1300 poor old men and women (2600 people in all) to dinner in St. George's Hall. Roast beef, plum-pudding, beer, tea, fruit and cakes were served, and both evenings were 'filled up with the speeches, glees, performances by Mr. Best on the grand organ, and instrumental performances by the local police band.'

At Windsor the bells of St. George's Chapel and the parish church rang all day, flags flew all over the town and the Royal Standard was raised at the castle. Royal salutes were fired in the Long Walk, at Fort Belvedere and at Virginia Water and, on relieving the Castle guard in the morning, the band of the Grenadier Guards played *Haste to the Wedding* followed by 'the Russian national air'. Every ship of war in all the ports of the country was dressed from stem to stern and, at one o'clock fired a royal salute and hoisted the English and Russian colours together. At night another salute was fired, and blue lights burned.

Piesse and Lubin, 'Royal Perfumiers', produced 'with consummate skill' a new scent called *Duchess of Edinburgh* ('Sold in bottles, 2s. 6d. to 21s. each, in all parts of the globe'); while the composers got busy with musical offerings such as the *Princess Marie Galop* and the *St. Petersburg Quadrille.*

At Osborne, the Queen read over the marriage service, 'thinking much of the young couple' and 'felt it very trying to be absent!' Many of the royal family, including the Prince and Princess of Wales, were in Russia for the ceremony, but the Queen gathered together a few who had been left behind for a celebration dinner. 'At half past seven', she wrote in her Journal, 'the ships, the guardship *Zealous*, and the *Royal Alfred* (sister ship) which had come over on purpose from Portsmouth, and the *Alberta*, all moored in Osborne Bay, lighted up and displayed fireworks.' Her Majesty wore the Star and Ribbon of the Order of St. Catherine, in tribute to the Russian bride, and Princess Beatrice (now 17), wore her Victoria and Albert Order for the first time. After dinner the royal party 'went down to the servants' hall, which was very prettily decorated with wreaths and flags, where a servants' ball took place. We remained through ten dances, Beatrice dancing the first country dance with George [*Duke of Cambridge*] . . . Did not get back to my room till half past one.'

When Queen Victoria's cousin, Princess Charlotte of Belgium, daughter of King Leopold, married the ill-fated Archduke Maximilian in 1857, the Queen wrote to her uncle: 'We do all we can to *fêter* in our very *quiet* way this dear day. We are all out of mourning; the younger children are to have a half-holiday, Alice [*14*] is to *dine* for the first time in the evening with us; we shall drink the *Archduke and Archduchess*'s healths; and I have ordered *wine* for our servants, and grog for our sailors to do the same . . .' Wine and grog were no doubt also provided for healths to the Duke and Duchess of Edinburgh.

In St. Petersburg the festivities for the Duke of

Edinburgh had been even more impressive. All the church bells in the city had been ringing for days and a heavy programme of dinners, balls and operas, both in St. Petersburg and Moscow, went on for a month. There were two wedding ceremonies: the first in the chapel of the Winter Palace, where the Duke of Edinburgh and the Grand Duchess were married according to the rites of the Greek Church, carrying candles and being crowned. When that was done, at about 1.30 p.m., the principals and their guests progressed to the other side of the Palace, where, in the Alexander Hall, an Anglican altar had been prepared and the Dean of Westminster was waiting to take them through the marriage service of the Church of England. The Grand Duchess was dressed in the kind of splendour which Queen Victoria's white satin and lace had made unfashionable in Britain thirty-four years earlier. The 'august bride' at St. Petersburg wore 'a silver embroidered robe and an Imperial mantle of crimson velvet lined with ermine; a diamond crown and diamond collar, and rich lace veil, adorned with orange flowers'. Her train was supported by four chamberlains and borne by the Equerry of the Court of her Imperial Highness'.

Royalty were always very nice about wearing little symbols of the land they were visiting, and when the new Duchess of Edinburgh arrived in Britain six weeks later, Queen Victoria was able to record: 'Marie ... wore a light blue dress with a long train and a white tulle bonnet with white roses and white heather, which I had purposely sent to Antwerp in the yacht.' The entry into London on this occasion was as spectacular and as warmly cheered as that of Princess Alexandra. This time it snowed instead of raining, but the royal party — including the Queen — still turned out in open carriages, and the crowds were there to cheer them.

These great alliances which were to spread a network of cousinship throughout the courts of Europe, are now

looked on as one of Queen Victoria's greatest achievements; but the Queen herself became heartily sick of the whole business. When her fourth daugher, Princess Louise, refused to contemplate a Prussian prince (proposed by her sister, the Princess Royal) and became 'most *decided* in her wish to *settle* in her *own* country', her mother was delighted. The Prince of Wales was not so happy, and used an argument which must have won the day many a time before — that his father wouldn't have liked it. On this occasion, however, Her Majesty was not to be swayed. Times had changed, she told her son, in a letter written on 29 November 1869:

There is nothing about which I am more anxious than that you and I should hold together about so important a subject as this concerning Louise's future . .

Times have much changed; great foreign alliances are looked on as causes of trouble and anxiety, and are of no good. What could be more painful than the position in which our family were placed during the wars with Denmark, and between Prussia and Austria? Every family feeling was rent asunder, and we were powerless. The Prussian marriage, supposing even Louise wished it and liked the Prince (whereas she has not even seen him since she was a child), would be one which would cause nothing but trouble and annoyances and unhappiness, and which *I never* would *consent* to. Nothing is more unpopular here or more uncomfortable for *me* and everyone, than the long residence of our married daughters from abroad in my house, with the quantities of foreigners they bring with them, the foreign view they entertain on all subjects; and in beloved Papa's lifetime this was totally different, and besides Prussia had not swallowed everything up. You may not be aware, as I am, with what *dislike* the marriages of Princesses of the Royal family with small German Princes (German beggars as they most insultingly were called) were looked [*on*], and how in former days many of our Statesmen like Mr. Fox, Lord Melbourne and Lord Holland abused these marriages, and said how wrong it was that alliances with noblemen of high rank and fortune, which had always existed formerly and which are perfectly legal, were no longer allowed by the

Sovereign. Now that the Royal family is so large (you have already five, and *what* will these be when your brothers marry?) in these days, when you ask Parliament to give money to all the Princesses to be *spent abroad*, when they could perfectly marry here and the children succeed just as much as if they were the children of a Prince or Princess, we could not maintain this exclusive principle. As to position I see no difficulty whatever; Louise remains what she is, and her husband keeps his rank (like the Mensdorffs and Victor), only being treated in the family as a relation when we are together.

I wish you would talk to the Dean and Lord Granville about it, you would see how well every side has been weighed, and how strong the reasons are for such an alliance. It will strengthen the *hold* of the Royal family, besides infusing new and healthy blood into it, whereas all the Princes abroad are related to one another; and while I could continue these foreign alliances with several members of the family, I feel sure that *new* blood will strengthen the Throne *morally* as well as physically.

The Queen was right about the sneers at German beggar-princes. In 1816, when Princess Charlotte married Prince Leopold of Saxe-Coburg, even the bride was said to have laughed as he repeated the words 'with all my worldly goods I thee endow' (*The Court of England under George IV*).

Princess Louise's eventual engagement to the Marquis of Lorne, heir to the Duke of Argyll, in October 1870, was exceptionally well received by the country. (Queen Victoria's children followed the revived fashion for betrothals. These were always publicly announced, and the wedding generally followed six months later.) Parliament still made a fuss about the marriage settlement but finally agreed to an annuity of £6000 and a dowry of £30,000. The people were less grudging. Presents poured in from all over the country (royal brides received many of them personally, from a steady stream of gift-bearing deputations) while the *Illustrated London News* embraced 'the innovation upon courtly custom', claiming 'there is no

affectation in saying that the nation would have regretted — let us, rather, put it in the nation's own homely phrase, "would have been very sorry if Princess Louise had been going away" . . . Dismissing, as unworthy of serious argument, the political considerations which have been imported into the question, we would say that the Queen's true womanly courage in regard to this marriage is proof that the high spirit of her race is unsubdued. Where a desirable union, one party to which held princely rank, was offered, the Queen naturally and properly mated her child in her own degree; but the Queen of England would not consign her child to celibacy or to undesirable wedlock because a Royal match did not present itself. The Sovereign recognises a higher and holier rule than that of the Courts.'

Royal weddings always inspired the composers of popular dance music — and the publishers of souvenir albums ('handsomely bound in boards' with 'beautiful' portraits of the bride and groom, 'lavishly embossed in gold'), but this bride also inspired '*The Princess Louise Crinoline* — does away with the unsightly results of the ordinary hoops'. In it a lady might now 'ascend a steep stair, lean against a table, throw herself in an arm-chair, pass to her stall at the opera, or occupy a fourth seat in a carriage without inconvenience to herself or others'. The price: 8s. 6d. ('with Pannier' 10s. 6d.) from Mrs. Addley Bourne, 37 Piccadilly. In the more regular line of tributes, were a *Grand Bridal March*, 'composed in honour of the Princess Louise', by W. Smallwood. (Beautifully illustrated. Price 3s.); *The Bride of Lorne* Polka-Mazurka, by J. T. Trekell ('a melodious and most graceful specimen of an elegant form of choregraphic music. Price 3s.'); and '*The Bridal Morn* — Wedding Fantasia for Piano, by W. F. Taylor. Introducing "Haste to the Wedding", "God Save the Queen," "The Campbells are coming," "The Wedding March," &c., with illustrated title, Inverary Castle. Sold for 2s.'

With the wedding of Princess Beatrice, Queen Victoria's youngest child and the last to marry, the royal bridal pattern broke down. The Queen was now 66, and the bride 28 — rather older than her sisters and sisters-in-law had been on their wedding days. Also, at the time of the Princess's engagement, the royal family was still in mourning for Queen Victoria's youngest son, Prince Leopold, Duke of Albany who, had died in March 1884. A quiet wedding on the Isle of Wight was thought to be most suitable in all the circumstances, and no doubt 'Baby', as Princess Beatrice was called, was astonished and thankful to be marrying at all.

It must have been a very pretty occasion: the date was 23 July 1885, and the sun shone as, ideally, it always should shine at the height of an English summer. This was the first royal wedding to be held in a parish church, and the small 'edifice' at Whippingham, close to Osborne House, which had been chosen for the honour, was suitably banked with flowers and had a wide striped awning from church porch to decorated lych gate ('adorned with evergreens, ferns roses and a magnificent garland of lilies') to take overflow guests as well as the bridal procession. Breaking all the rules, Princess Beatrice had ten bridesmaids instead of the usual eight; they were all the daughters of her sisters and brothers and all rather younger than previously ('some of them quite small children', said the *Illustrated London News* in surprise). There were also two pages, another royal innovation. The Queen, assisted by the Prince of Wales, gave her daughter away, wearing jewels among which 'the Koh-i-Noor was conspicuous'. The bridegroom, Prince Henry of Battenberg, eighteen months younger than his bride, looked extraordinarily dashing in white uniform, many orders, thigh-high boots and a handsome moustache. (The Princess of Wales is said to have taken one look at all these trappings of a Prussian guardsman, and dubbed him 'Beatrice's Lohengrin'.) Queen Victoria, always susceptible to male beauty, was delighted to have him around, as long as it

truly meant gaining a son and not losing a daughter. After the 'sumptuous wedding breakfast', served in the marquees which dotted the lawns at Osborne, and a two day honeymoon six miles from her mother's side, it was firmly established that the Princess and her husband should live with Her Majesty.

The chief bridesmaid at Princess Beatrice's wedding was the eldest daughter of the Prince of Wales, Princess Louise, and four years later it was her turn to marry. At the age of 22, she became engaged to the 40-year-old Duke of Fife, and once again Queen Victoria was delighted to think of a British princess making her home in Britain.

The wedding was to take place exactly one month later, and the bride asked for it to be held in the chapel of Buckingham Place. This had not been used since the days of Prince Albert, nor had the State rooms leading to it. A speedy renovation job was put in hand. 'When the decorations are finished, the floor will be carpeted, and on the marriage day the interior will be adorned with palms, foliage, plants, and the choicest flowers from the conservatories of the Royal gardens at Frogmore', announced the *Illustrated London News* a week before the ceremony.

At noon on Saturday, 27 July, the bridal party drove from Marlborough House, London home of the Prince of Wales, through great crowds to Buckingham Palace, where 'as the well known music of Wagner's March from 'Lohengrin' came from the organ the bride entered [*the chapel*] on the arm of the Prince of Wales . . . His Royal Highness in the uniform of a Field Marshal.' Women's fashions were now extremely becoming — nothing outrageous, but all splendidly curvaceous. The bride's gown was of white lace, with a low V-neck in front and a small stand-up collar behind. It was 'well-built', in the fashion phrase of the time, but simple. Too simple, thought Queen Victoria, who complained to the Princess Royal in German: 'Little Louise was vy pale . . . She was not near so

pretty a Bride as my dear Children, & she was too plainly dressed — & had her veil over her face wh. *no Pcess* ever had & wh. I think unbecoming & not right . . .' The six 'Brides-Maids', however, she thought 'looked vy pretty'. They broke away from the white tradition by wearing what the newspapers described as 'dresses in a lovely shade of blush pink faille with demi-trains draped with crêpe de Chine, over which were arranged broad moiré sashes'. They all carried bouquets of pink roses and had more pink roses in their hair. (Two of them were the bride's sisters, and another was a distant cousin, Princess May of Teck.) the bridegroom wore the uniform of the Banffshire Volunteer Artillery, and his best man. Mr. Horace Farquhar, was in 'a scarlet uniform'. Although the bride was the eldest daughter of the heir to the throne, the ceremony was scaled down to that of a private occasion — gone were the two supporters each for bride and groom, and gone the elaborate processions. The Archbishop of Canterbury, however, was in charge, as usual.

Princess Alexandra, the mother of the bride, who almost invariably wore white at other people's weddings (at that of her sister-in-law, Princess Beatrice, four years earlier, she had been 'looking radiant in a costume of white satin trimmed with moss roses'), chose lavender figured silk for her daughter's marriage. Queen Victoria was, as always, in black. The ruling for lesser guests was: 'Levée dress to be worn by gentlemen. Evening dress (demi-toilette) by ladies.'

When Princess Louise's brother, Prince George, Duke of York, married after another interval of four years, the low key of this last wedding was set aside. After his father (the Prince of Wales), the Duke was next in line to the throne, and therefore warranted all the pomp and circumstance which could be mustered. St. George's Chapel, Windsor, should once more have been the scene of this splendour, but there were sad reasons which made it unsuitable. The Duke of York's bride was Her Serene Highness Princess Victoria Mary Augusta Louise Olga Pauline

Claudine Agnes — more affectionately known as Princess May of Teck (and later to be called, with equal affection, Queen Mary). Only eighteen months earlier, Princess May had been engaged to Prince Albert Victor, elder brother of the Duke of York, and he, one month after the announcement of the engagement and one month before the proposed marriage, had died of influenza and pneumonia, at the age of 28. His funeral had been held in St. George's Chapel; Princess May's orange-blossom wreath, prepared for the wedding, had been placed on his coffin; and May blossom — '*Her* flower *now* being woven for the wedding train!' as her mother wrote to Queen Victoria — had filled the dead prince's room. Overnight, Princess May had become a tragic heroine, and the nation had truly mourned: 'The newspapers full of touching accounts', wrote the Queen in her Journal. 'Special services almost everywhere. London a wonderful sight, every possible house, shop, and theatre voluntarily closed, and everyone in mourning.'

That had been in mid-January 1892. By July 1893, all had marvellously changed, and, as a cartoon in the *Lady's Pictorial* put it: 'Now is the Winter of our discontent made glorious summer by the sun of York.' The second son of the Prince of Wales had become number two in succession to the throne and number one in Princess May's affections. After an eight week engagement, they were married in the Chapel Royal of St. James's Palace, in a blazing summer, so glorious it had London gasping. A few weeks earlier, Queen Victoria had written to her eldest daughter: 'The wedding of Georgie is to be in the first week of July, & alas! in the Chapel Royal. Windsor is lovely for a marriage in the summer — but I quite feel it cld not be *after* the sad funeral in St. George's . . . The Chapel Royal is . . . small & *very* ugly.' It was also where both the Queen and the Princess Royal had been married, which brought back many memories as Her Majesty watched her grandson at the altar: 'I could not but remember that *I* had stood, where May did, fifty-three

years ago, and dear Vicky thirty-five years ago, and that the dear ones, who stood where Georgie did, were gone from us! May those dear children's happiness last longer!'

Princess May, who had gone through all the rigours of choosing wedding clothes during her first engagement — 'we get trousseau things sent to us on approval from all parts of England, Scotland & Ireland so that we are nearly driven mad & have not a moment's peace' — had to go through it all again during the second. The Royal Wedding Number of the *Lady's Pictorial* described, as only 'a portion of the trousseau', forty outdoor suits, fifteen ball-gowns, five tea-gowns, and bonnets, shoes and gloves without number.

The royal wedding presents (£3,500 'articles of value', estimated to be worth £300,000, ranging from a 'golden bread-basket' and 'an old French ormolu clock' to 'golf sets' and gongs) were put on show to the public at the newly opened Imperial Institute. After the presents came the royal relations, the heads of most of the states of Europe. The wedding was the most public there had ever been in Britain and the build-up of gala opera nights and dinners was gruelling, especially in the incredible heat. The day before the ceremony, the Prince of Wales gave a garden party in the grounds of Marlborough House. Queen Victoria, always the best reporter on such occasions, described in her Journal how she arrived there at 5.30 p.m., rather later than everyone else: 'drove with Beatrice and Irène (the others having gone on before) to Marlborough House, where a gigantic Garden-party took place, 5,000 people having been invited! All the steps crowded, so that I got out at a side door, where Bertie [*the Prince of Wales*] met me, and led me to the tea tent in the garden. Alix, Georgie, the girls, and all the family as also the Paris [*the Comte and Comtesse de Paris and their daughter*] ... Hélène (in great beauty), and four Indian Princes. The Salisburys, Mr. and Mrs. Gladstone, etc., were brought up to speak to me, some before and some after tea.

The heat was quite awful.' And the Duchess of Edinburgh (formerly the Grand Duchess Marie Alexandrovna of Russia) did nothing to make it seem better. According to the *Lady's Pictorial*, she wore 'a rather hot looking gown in green and garnet coloured silk brocaded with velvet and a green bonnet trimmed with red roses'. (The temperature that day was over 80 degrees and humid.)

At night there was a 'great dinner' at Buckingham Palace, at which the 74-year-old Queen (after a brief rest in her own garden, 'which refreshed one a little') presided, sitting between 'the King of Denmark who led me in, and the Cesarewitch, who is charming. His great likeness to Georgie leads to no end of funny mistakes, the one being taken for the other! The Artillery Band played. The men of the Indian Escort were posted in the four rooms, but one nearly fainted from standing so long motionless.'

All the main characters in the wedding drama were staying at Buckingham Palace, and next morning, while the Queen was being dressed in her own wedding lace, 'over a light black stuff', and her wedding veil, 'surmounted by a small coronet', the bride was led in, in all her finery, to receive Her Majesty's blessing. She 'looked very sweet', wrote Queen Victoria. 'Her dress was very simple, of white satin with a silver design of roses, shamrocks, thistles and orange flowers, interwoven. On her head she had a small wreath of orange flowers, myrtle, and white heather surmounted by the diamond necklace I gave her, which can also be worn as a diadem, and her mother's wedding veil.' (The previous silk of woven May blossom had been discarded as too sad a reminder of the past. The *Bradford Wedding Journal*, doing a round-up of royal weddings in 1911, said it had been cut up on the bride's instructions and distributed to friends.)

Princess May's wedding gown can still be seen at the London Museum and it is certainly not what we would call 'simple' today. The brocade itself is very rich, incorporating heather and true-love knots in the design, as well as the symbols listed by Queen Victoria. The low-cut

bodice is engineered rather than sewn, sleeveless apart from a small frill of lace over one of chiffon, and lavishly trimmed with orange flowers and leaves. The brocade overshirt is open down the front, showing plain white satin beneath, garlanded with three flounces of lace and decorated with more orange blossom and heather; behind, it forms a short train, trimmed with a wide ruche of white satin. The Honiton lace veil was very small and must have looked old-fashioned even when the Duchess of Teck wore it in 1866. Lady Geraldine Somerset, lady-in-waiting to Princess May's grandmother, and never a loyal supporter of the Tecks, thought it a wretched little thing. 'May . . . was not veiled *at all*!!' she wrote in her diary, 'her veil hung in a little tiny narrow strip but a couple of inches wide *quite* at the *back* of her head only like an elongated lappet!' (Lappets were the decorative frilled streamers — 'unmeaning pendants', according to Horace Walpole — which dangled from ladies' caps and bonnets throughout the 18th and 19th centuries.) A modern touch, however, was the bride's huge 'shower bouquet', a shape which had only recently ousted the posy.

Outside Buckingham Palace, the whole of London was splendid with garlands and banners, 'Venetian masts' and triumphant arches. Spectators were now actively considered on such occasions, and for their benefit, the long route to the Chapel Royal — along Constitution Hill and Piccadilly — had been chosen for the procession. Garlands of greenery and flowers hung overhead all the way, and St. James's Street was, thought Lady Geraldine Somerset, 'like a bower from end to end . . . garlands of green across and between the Venetian masts with bracelets of flowers suspended from them, *too* pretty'. All the houses in the street were so thickly hung with silk and velvet flags and banners that scarcely a brick could be seen, and at the Pall Mall end there were two Corinthian columns of imitation marble, crowned with 'floral trophies and tall tufts of waving Pampas grass'.

Twelve open scarlet and gold carriages, each drawn by

four cream horses, formed the first procession of royal guests which set off from Buckingham Palace at 11.30. The bridegroom followed, supported by his father, the Prince of Wales, and his uncle, Prince Alfred, Duke of Edinburgh, all three in naval uniform with white satin bridal bows on their shoulders. Queen Victoria left next, in what she described as 'the new State glass coach with four creams, amidst a flourish of trumpets'. In the new coach with her was the bride's mother, the Duchess of Teck. (The Duchess had been born Princess Mary Adelaide of Cambridge, and her father, the Duke of Cambridge, was one of the three sons of George III sent so unceremoniously to the altar when Princess Charlotte died.) She was fat and jolly, a first cousin to Queen Victoria, and immensely popular. The glass coach took the short route down the Mall to the Chapel, the same journey the Queen had taken fifty-three years earlier, when she was herself a bride, and when royal weddings were still thought of as private rather than public occasions.

Princess May was last to leave the Palace. Supported by her father, the Duke of Teck, and her brother, Prince Adolphus, she rode in the last carriage of all. Her ten bridesmaids, all of them the bridegroom's sisters or cousins ('of whom there are a great number', as the Queen rightly said), joined her at the chapel, wearing white satin with 'a little pink & red rose on the shoulder & some small bows of the same on the shoes'. Princess Alexandra, mother of the Duke of York, was back in white again: 'a very lovely white dress trimmed with chiffon and embroidered with silver and magnificent diamond ornaments. The Princess of Wales has seemed to look lovelier and lovelier on each occasion that her highness has appeared in public', thought the *Lady's Pictorial.* This journal also reported that the Queen of Denmark, mother of the Princess of Wales and grandmother of the bridegroom, was in white, 'and so was the Duchess of Fife whose dress, as usual, was simple but of an exquisite build'. The Marchioness of Ormonde, 'who was one of those bidden to the wedding, was dressed

in white satin, with clever and delicate touches of pink. Lady Ormonde wore magnificent jewels.' And, 'The Marchioness of Londonderry was dressed . . . in pure white satin, and wore a high coronet of diamonds.' Many of the gentlemen, according to the *Illustrated London News*, wore 'court dress or uniform and the chains or badges of Knighthood; the ladies were in evening dress, without trains, and made a great display of jewels.'

Queen Victoria, taking the short route home again, was first to arrive back at the Palace, where she nipped quickly out on to the balcony, alone, to much cheering from the crowds below. Then: 'Very soon the Bride and Bridegroom arrived, and I stepped out on the balcony with them, taking her by the hand, which produced another great outburst of cheering.' A royal bridal tradition was born.

After the signing of the register in the 'Bow room saloon', protocol was set aside as the Duke and Duchess of York led the royal guests to luncheon in the large dining-room, where they were seated at seven small tables. 'It was very prettily arranged', wrote Queen Victoria. 'I gave two toasts, the Bride and Bridegroom and the King and Queen of Denmark, the King giving out my health.'

Luncheon ended shortly after 4 p.m.; photographs were posed for; and then the Duke and Duchess changed into their going-away clothes. 'Dear May came in looking very pretty in her dress of white poplin edged with gold, and a pretty little toque with roses.' (A 'toque', the hat for which Queen Mary became famous, was already on the scene.) The Duke of York wore a black frock coat and top hat. Lady Geraldine Somerset described the departure: 'May kissed us all and went off — we saw her and the Duke of York get into the carriage receive the shower of slippers and drive *au pas* round the Quadrangle amid cheers and as they passed under the portico we rushed into the bedroom and from the balcony saw the Prince [*of Wales*], the Duke of Edinbro: and Duke [*of Cambridge*]! and all the Princes standing round the *grandes grilles* of

the outer railing and as the Duke and Duchess of York drove into the Mall shower them with rice! Then they drove along the Mall with the magnificent Blues amid ringing cheers.'

Cheers followed them all the way as they drove through 'the principal streets of London' to Liverpool Street Station, where (announced a writer in *The Star*) 'great things' had been done. 'The grimy girders on the roof have been hung with flags and, startling as it may appear, the glass roof outside the main booking office has been scrubbed. Nothing but a stern sense of duty would have induced the Company to take so serious a step.'

A special train took 'the happy pair' to Sandringham, where the Prince of Wales had 'lent, and had arranged for them the Cottage'. As the bride's first *fiancé*, the Duke of Clarence, had died at Sandringham, Queen Victoria was not alone in thinking it an odd choice for the honeymoon. She regretted it, she told the Princess Royal, thinking it 'rather *unlucky* & sad'. But there was certainly nothing mournful about the welcome which greeted the young couple when their train pulled into Wolferton Station, near Sandringham, at eight o'clock that night. Velvet-pile carpets covered all the floors, flowering plants, ferns and palms were everywhere, and in the station yard, more Venetian masts bore 'lines of pennons'. The Chief Constable of Norfolk, a 'strong force' of whose men lined the route, was on the platform to welcome them, and an escort of the Royal Suffolk Hussars waited outside. As they left the station yard, their carriage passed under one triumphal arch of greenery and crimson cloth, bearing the royal insignia, and 'on the brow of the hill leading from the railway premises another arch of graceful proportions bore upon its face, in bronze and gold letters on a crimson ground, the word 'Welcome'. The flanks were entwined with ribbons bearing the mottoes 'God bless our Princess May', 'God bless the happy pair', 'Long live the Duke of York', 'Health to the Royal pair', and 'God bless our Sailor Prince'. It was surmounted by a Prince of Wales's

coronet, behind which rose a flagstaff bearing the national standard, and at each end of the structure were displayed ducal coronets and flagstaffs flying the naval and blue ensign and the ensign of St. George.' Masts with 'medallions emblazoned with the initials G. and M., trophies of flags, and true-lovers' knots' also decorated their route and over a thousand 'Sandringham tenantry, work-people, and cottagers', who had been given a three o'clock wedding feast in a marquee on the estate, were there, with thousands of other spectators, to cheer them. 'York Cottage was reached at about half-past eight o'clock', said the *Illustrated London News* (who gave all the other information, too): 'An interesting surprise awaited the royal pair after reaching home. Suddenly, to their evident astonishment, the islands and the rocks in the ornamental waters were illuminated with fairy lamps, the rustic bridge and boat-house being outlined with the same, while the girths of about fifty trees were illuminated by fairy lamps and Japanese lanterns. On the highest part of the park there was a display of fireworks.'

Queen Victoria appears to have had no objection to the union of cousins — even first cousins — but did not believe in marrying more than one child into the same family. At the wedding of the Prince of Wales, several people had been taken with the good looks and nice manners of the bride's brother, Prince William of Denmark (who later became King George I of the Hellenes) and thought, like Lord Clarendon, that such 'a gentil looking lad . . . wd: do very well for one of our little Princesses but The Q: won't hear of it. She says one of a family is enough.'

On proxy weddings, Her Majesty's views were less definite. They had gone out of fashion in Britain at the end of the previous century, and the Queen wrote of them as though they were part of some strange but interesting foreign cult. In May 1858, with the marriage of the Princess Royal still fresh in her mind, she was moved almost to tears by the beautiful Princess Stephanie of Hohenzollern-Sigmaringen, who had been married by proxy at Berlin to

King Pedro V of Portugal. On her way to her new country, Queen Stephanie stayed at Buckingham Palace, and Queen Victoria wrote to her own daughter of the proxy ceremony: 'How touching it must all have been. How I should have liked to have seen it — and yet how strange to be married without one's husband!' A week later, the day before Stephanie was to sail for Portugal, the Queen continued: 'Poor dear child, what an undertaking — do think to go alone to a husband she don't know — without a mother — or mother-in-law she knows!! Think of all this and all you know and feel must be gone through and no mother at hand! You may imagine what I feel for the dear sweet child!'

Such romantic sentiments bore no sway in the management of royal matrimonials in most Continental countries, and certainly not in those of France. Lord Malmesbury told of three typical alliances manipulated by the French, with not a drop of romance in one of them. Of the much talked of 'Spanish marriages' of 1846, he wrote:

News from Spain has been very interesting of late. The marriage of the Queen with the Duke of Cadis is settled, in spite of her abhorrence of him; and that of her sister with the Duc de Montpensier is announced to take place at the same time. This is a masterpiece of Louis Philippe's cunning, because it is known that the Queen would not have children, even if her own bad health made it possible. Her sister will then be heir to the throne. The English Government, especially Lord Palmerston, are much displeased, and Mr. Bulwer and M. de Bresson, their respective Ministers at Madrid, are on the coolest terms since the announcement has been made, it having taken Lord Palmerston completely by surprise.

In March 1860, Malmesbury quoted a philosophically brave Princess, trapped in another political match:

The annexation of Savoy, together with the neutral States of Chablais and Faucigny, which is now a *fait accompli*, has shaken the confidence of the people in the Government.

There is a *bon mot* of the Princess Clothilde on this subject which is worth recording. Alluding to the transfer of Savoy to France and her own unwelcome marriage, she said: *'Quand on a vendu l'enfant, on peut bien vendre le berceau.'*

At non-royal level, marriages arranged by friends were still accepted practice on both sides of the Channel. Miss Betham Edwards (in *Home Life in France*) tells of a summer picnic near Besançon, where a companion asked her: 'Do you see that young lady in pink, beside her wet nurse and baby? ... Her marriage to Professor T — was arranged by friends of mine. After the first introduction he declared that no, nothing on earth would induce him to marry a girl with such a nose; she has a very long nose, certainly. But on further knowledge he found her agreeable and accomplished, and now they are as happy as possible.'

Barbara Charlton (*Recollections of a Northumbrian Lady*) wrote of a match she arranged between two of her friends who had never met each other. After a series of letters from both sides to Mrs. Charlton, a meeting was organised: 'Major Darell came to Hesleyside by special invitation on the 17th and Isabella Eyre, by a curious coincidence, put in an appearance on the 18th. The stage was set; the proposal was duly made and, as duly, accepted. ... Archbishop Manning married the happy pair. At the wedding reception an accident threw a transitory depression on the newly married couple. One of the young Eyres, perhaps too full of champagne, removed his sister's chair when she rose to cut the cake in consequence of which she sat down heavily on the ground. It was a typical piece of Catholic horseplay.'

Catholic, Protestant, or anything else, this was the century for innocent superstitions); none of them taken too seriously and many of them still with us, just for fun:

A bride must not be completely dressed until the last

moment of setting out for church — when a final stitch should be added to her dress for good luck;

A bride should not look in a mirror before she is dressed, nor after her toilet is completed;

To change the name, and not the letter,
Is to change for the worse, and not for the better.

Each day of the week was now given an omen:

Monday for wealth,
Tuesday for health,
Wednesday the best day of all;
Thursday for crosses,
Friday for losses,
Saturday no luck at all.

The superstition that bride and groom should not meet on their wedding day until they do so at the altar also began in Victorian times, though when Princess May of Teck and the Duke of York caught sight of each other from opposite ends of one of the long, long corridors of Buckingham Palace on their marriage morning, they took it as a happy sign. They were a constrained couple, always writing to explain how much they loved each other and apologising that they could not actually *say* so; both were warmed by the brief encounter. The Duke, according to Queen Mary's official biographer (James Pope-Hennessy) 'swept her a low and courtly bow. This gesture she never forgot.'

Colours, always deeply significant, were now lined up like this:

Married in white, you have chosen right,
Married in green, ashamed to be seen,
Married in grey, you will go far away,
Married in red, you will wish yourself dead,
Married in blue, love ever true,
Married in yellow, you're ashamed of your fellow,

Married in black, you will wish yourself back,
Married in pink, of you he'll aye think.

Blue retained its ancient connections with constancy, which no doubt accounts for its inclusion in the most famous — and most regarded — rhyme of all:

Something old, something new,
Something borrowed, and something blue;
And a silver sixpence in your shoe

but this "traditional" good-luck jingle was not to become really popular until the 20th century.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Some things old, some things new
The Twentieth Century

June means weddings in everyone's lexicon,
Weddings in Swedish, weddings in Mexican.
Breezes play Mendelssohn, treeses play Youmans,
Birds wed birds, and humans wed humans.
All year long the gentlemen woo,
But the ladies dream of a June 'I do.'
Ladies grow loony, and gentlemen loonier;
This year's June is next year's Junior.

Ogden Nash:
Here Usually Comes The Bride

And so to the present century — and a wedding world apparently run mad. During the last ten or fifteen years, there have been brides in hot pants, brides in Arab caftans, brides in tatty ancient finery culled from the nearest jumble sale; unmarried 'brides' presenting their newborn children to the world and proclaiming they feel just as much married as anyone who ever walked to the altar.

But these are the exceptions which hit the headlines.

The dull black print of the majority of wedding notices, and the pages of wedding photographs in local and provincial papers, put the balance straight: for most people, things haven't changed. Not two world wars, nor Women's Lib, nor all the social turmoil of the last half-century have made more than a tiny crack in the upper crust of the great white wedding tradition.

Brides themselves may long for a quiet and private affair, but when it comes to the crunch they are mostly overwhelmed by family pressure and find themselves involved in a celebration much the same as any random sample taken from the last hundred years.

Winefride Jackson, writing in the *Sunday Telegraph* in April 1972, told of a recent 'grand white wedding' which she had attended, a wedding which 'almost never happened' because the bride and bridegroom wanted a quiet registry office ceremony while the bride's parents were determined to have 'a traditional happening in their local cathedral'. The parents won 'due to us all, including the groom's parents (who wouldn't have to pay for the reception) nagging the bride and groom not to be selfish, that the occasion was as much the bride's mother's day of pride as the bride's day of joy'. It's a well-known battle. What won the day in this particular case — conscience or 'an excess of gin taken during stress' — was never clear, but whatever the cause the result was the same: the bride in long white dress and long white veil; a great gathering of friends and relations, a slap-up party, and champagne flowing like lemonade.

In the same article, Miss Jackson told of another kind of good old-fashioned wedding still going strong — a Scottish celebration, on the Isle of Lewis, which remained in full decibel swing at midnight. 'The reception was at the hotel where I stayed. I swear that not even waiting at an international airport with jets screaming back and forth created so much noise. Sleep was impossible. At midnight I went downstairs and there leaning against the lower banister was a disconsolate bride, still in her long

white dress and veil, waiting patiently for a groom reluctant to break up the party.'

The laws covering church marriages in England still require that banns should be called on three successive Sundays (and a licence — present cost £5 — purchased), and that the ceremony should take place within the district in which one of the parties lives, or at the church at which they usually worship, between the hours of 8 a.m. and 6 p.m. on any day of the year, with open doors and in the presence of two witnesses. Both bride and groom have, at some point of the ceremony, to vow that they take each other as man or wife, and solemnly declare they know of no lawful impediment to the match. (The reason for the open doors is to ensure that anyone who does know of a lawful impediment can get into the church to say so.)

Special licences, granted only by the Archbishop of Canterbury, are still available, though they are hard to come by. (They are no longer particularly expensive, however; while other marriage costs have slowly risen, this one has remained the same: £25.) These, as formerly, permit the marriage to take place anywhere, at any time, but the 'special circumstances' which demand such accommodation have to meet with his Grace's approval.

In Scotland weddings can be held anywhere at any time by law — no licence, special or otherwise, being necessary. And, although three readings of the banns are legally specified, 'by immemorial practice proclamation on one Sunday' only is accepted. The posting of a notice of the intended marriage for seven days in a prominent place at a registrar's office, is also allowed in lieu of banns (though a clergyman can refuse to perform a marriage which has not been declared in church). One of the parties still has to have lived (or to have had a parent living) in the district for fifteen days before the ceremony, but, even with this limitation, getting married in Scotland is just quicker and simpler enough to tempt runaway lovers over the border. For a brief time during the 1950s,

eloping became almost as fashionable as in the 18th century, and one young man of slender means and large ambition kept himself in style for several years by heading north with a series of romantic heiresses, getting caught before the knot was tied, and allowing himself to be 'persuaded' by angry — and rich — fathers to relinquish all claim to the young ladies. In September 1972, the *Daily Mail* told the story of a couple of English school-children who married in Dumfries while their parents thought they were on holiday in Wales. The 16-year-old bride decided not to go back to school afterwards to take her A-levels. She thought she would get a job and keep her 17-year-old husband at technical college. Children are maturing earlier, say the experts.

Easter and June are still thought of as the high peaks of the year for 'traditional' weddings, though in the middle years of the century the main wedding rush came at the end of March: it was discovered that no matter how late a man married in the tax year, he could claim a full year's tax benefit for having a wife. The popularity of this mean-spirited manoeuvre killed it. The men at the Inland Revenue changed the rules.

The Anglican wedding service, little changed since the reign of Elizabeth I, is happily followed by most Protestant brides, though it can be adapted to suit individual tastes. Some girls, even in the rosy glow of their wedding day, now find the word 'Obey' too subservient, and ask to have it left out, feeling terribly modern and liberated as they do so. They may well be liberated, but they are not particularly modern: the word was having a tough time even at the beginning of the century. Constance Gore-Booth, the stunning Irish beauty (who was to be jailed by the English for her part in the 1916 Irish troubles), did not promise to obey the Polish Count Casimir Dunin-Markievicz when she married him in September 1900, though, in every other way, the wedding at St. Mary's Church, Marylebone, London, was splendidly conventional. According to her biographer, Anne Marreco: 'A large trous-

seau was bought. She chose a wedding dress of white satin with a bodice of lace and chiffon and a full court train of silver brocade. Her jewels for the great day were gifts from her mother: a pearl necklace, a diamond pendant, and a diamond crescent . . . She was supported by four bridesmaids — her two sisters dressed in violet satin, and her friends, Miss Rachel Mansfield and Miss Mildred Grenfell, in green trimmed with lace in compliment to Ireland. The bridegroom wore a nobleman's court uniform consisting of a black tunic trimmed with gold braid, and white trousers.'

An occasion on which the word 'obey' might understandably have been omitted was the wedding of Princess Elizabeth, heiress-presumptive to the British throne, when she married Lieutenant Philip Mountbatten R.N. in November 1947. But she did in fact promise to 'Love, cherish and obey' her husband; and so did her sister, Princess Margaret, thirteen years later, though many of the newspapers then noted that 'it is a word often omitted from their promises by modern brides'. The Duchess of Gloucester brought particular praise from male journalists covering her wedding in 1935. Being married in an Episcopalian ceremony, which does not usually demand obedience of the bride, she could have escaped without censure, but particularly asked for the word to be included.

In March 1972, a less exalted bride dispensed with a different piece of the wedding service — the ceremony of being given away. According to the *Daily Mail* (in a story headlined 'Now It's Equal Rites for the Bride' — 9 March 1972), the idea came from her father, Mr. Tom Cullingworth, of Sale, Cheshire, who thought the practice 'inappropriate today', when women are 'no longer the chattels of their father or husband'. The twenty-two-year-old bride, Marilyn, said: 'This is not a great Woman's Lib thing. The ceremony will be perfectly normal and my father will make a speech as father of the bride at the reception. The idea not go give me away was his, but I am

in entire agreement. It seems superfluous in this day and age.'

The minister of Nuthall Methodist Church, the Reverend D. Matthew Wilkes, who was to perform the ceremony, thought the idea 'logical'. The new Methodist marriage service, introduced in 1971, made the question 'Who gives this woman to be married to this man?' optional, so he would simply be leaving it out.

Even in New Zealand, which for so long seemed to be two islands of sanity in an otherwise dotty world, the marriage pattern is occasionally exploded by free-thinking youth. In June 1972, the Deputy Prime Minister, Mr. Robert Muldoon, was photographed with a brave smile and his daughter and new son-in-law — the bridal pair both wearing long hair, matching embroidered kaftans and what looked very like Dr. Scholl's best remedial sandals. The New Zealand *Listener* (8 November 1971) told of even more way-out occasions, like the wedding of two Wellington students who returned from a visit to India with 'very definite ideas about the ceremony they wanted'. In the living-room of their 'small cottage flat', with ten to fourteen guests seated on cushions around them, bride and groom read 'appropriate extracts' from two books — one by Sri Nadhava Ashish and a piece from Katha Upanishad. Then a friend played a little Bach on his guitar, while the bridegroom went 'to a sort of altar set up against the wall where he symbolically offered up the elements air, earth, fire and water to Khrishna'. At the end of the half-hour ceremony, in which the Victoria University chaplain also performed, all the guests joined in a haphazard jam-session on any instrument which came to hand. More guests were invited to a curry feast afterwards.

The symbolic offerings to Khrishna, 'A reminder to the couple of "something bigger than themselves" ', are also a reminder of the symbolic offerings of fire and water at Roman weddings.

Another event echoed the bride-ales and penny wed-

dings of the 16th and 17th centuries: 'Bernice and Mel King had a traditional church wedding and were thoroughly satisfied with it. Together they planned the whole celebration, made their own cake, chose the hymns to be sung . . . tied the ribbons to deck the pews . . . Most of their 120 guests were church people. Women of the church banded together to provide the wedding breakfast, which was a lunch in the church hall.'

In May 1971, shortly before the wedding of U.S. President's daughter, Patricia Nixon, the London *Daily Mail's* New York correspondent reported:

When Tricia weds Ed and becomes Mrs. Cox in the White House rose garden next month, it will be as proper a nuptial as was ever laid on. But outside the influence of Presidential protocol and formality, the conventional wedding is taking a bashing.

This spring, marriage American-style is being held down in the meadows, up on the mountains, bare-footed on beaches, at midnight or in the rosy light of dawn.

Even that temple of tradition, New York's St. Patrick's Cathedral, conceding to changing tastes, had dispensed with Lohengrin and substituted guitar music, and now offers a choice of twenty-one variations in the wording and style of the marriage vows and service.

The Rev. Joseph Bishop, of a New York Presbyterian church, says one in four of the marriages he performs these days have been altered, if not completely rewritten, to personal specifications of the bride and groom.

With an unsentimental recognition that one in every four American marriages ends in divorce, 'Till Death us do Part' often becomes 'For all the years that are to be.'

The *Mail*-man didn't mention the wedding palaces springing up around the land, with special stage effects on hire, geared to make the whole show look more like a night at the opera than the sacred rite of matrimony, but he might have done: America has always been one delirious leap ahead with the unconventional. In December 1944, when many an English bridegroom still felt

conspicuous in a registry office, Elliott Roosevelt, second son of President Franklin D. Roosevelt, married his third wife (film star Faye Emerson) in a glass-enclosed observation platform on the edge of the Grand Canyon, with nothing but snow and swirling mists below them. The maid-of-honour was the bridegroom's ten-year-old daughter by a previous marriage. The bride thought it was 'probably the most beautiful wedding there ever was'. Since then couples have been married in swimming pools in the States and on horseback in England. Dogs have appeared as bridal attendants — and in America, at any rate, the dogs have been dyed to match the bride's ensemble. James Lascelles, an heir to the British throne (albeit only 20th in line of succession) married in April 1973, wearing a Tibetan wool jerkin over cream leather jeans, with two necklaces of beads and flowing shoulder-length hair; and had the Global Village Trucking Company Progressive Rock Group to accompany the informal reception afterwards.

But these are the oddities, the way-out events which catch the publicity just because they are so different. For every one of them a dozen women's page writers say, with astonishment, 'still the traditional white wedding persists'. In June 1972, *Sunday Express* columnist Veronica Papworth said the same thing, though not with satisfaction. The money could be better spent, she thought. Instead of 'the tents and togs, cars and catering, flowers and frill-me-downs — not to mention buckets-full of booze' she suggested her own style of wedding reception: held in a Buckinghamshire field in hot sunshine, with the two witnesses and a bottle of champagne. She didn't expect to change anything though and included pictures and details of the latest range of long, white, organdie wedding dresses priced from £25 to £31.50, as her contribution to cutting down the cost of the customary grand affair.

Throughout the century the tradition has been under attack: in the Twenties, Bright Young Things thought it 'old hat'; in the Thirties, the politically conscious refused

to contaminate their ideals with such bourgeois display; during the Fifties and Sixties, Modern Youth wanted to 'do their own thing'. But the white wedding refused to die and during the Forties, in wartime, when it could not have been more difficult to arrange, it became the most desired aim of all — a comforting and defiant return to normality.

In the early 1930s, *The Bride's Book, or Young Housewife's Compendium*, 'Compiled and Written by two ladies of England', described what a bride should wear, and, with few exceptions, the advice holds good for most weddings at any time during the century:

> If you have a large number of conventionally minded friends whom you desire to please rather than flout, you will not depart much further from the traditional white or ivory bridal gown than present custom readily permits — silver, pale gold, or the very lightest of blue, pink, or lilac shades.
>
> The orange blossoms, the lace or tulle veil, the long train sweeping from the shoulders — all these, extravagant though they be, and ephemeral in their usefulness, — must be chosen so as to fulfil the demands of tradition. In the dress itself fashion will be followed, but at a distance. Nowadays, young ladies frequently turn their bridal robes into evening dresses when the honeymoon is ended; but unless your wardrobe is a very meagre one, we recommend the old sentimental custom of preserving this gown, the only one of its kind you will ever possess, in its pristine glory as a treasure for your descendants.

With regard to the honeymoon, the 'two ladies of England' said resolutely that they were not going to 'look upon the black side' of this 'institution which may truthfully be said to be a success much oftener than it is a failure. We will content ourselves by stating the simple fact that some honeymoons *are* failures.'

Trousseaux, on the other hand, they were prepared to study from all angles. The quantity of 'lace-trimmed garments, of diaphanous linens, of exquisite tea-gowns, of wraps and bonnets and shoes and gloves and smart

dresses' required to make a young wife feel respectably equipped 'a generation or two ago' would, they believed, 'startle the modern journalist and judges who comment on women's extravagance in dress as if it were a new thing. The rule was simply this — A Dozen of Everything . . . Such reckless expenditure is unknown today except in the ever-diminishing class which is ostentatious as well as rich.'

Under the heading *Lingerie*, they instructed:

Unless you are very rich or very busy it will be a serious extravagance for you to buy in a shop any lingerie that you can possibly produce with your own hands. The price of good made-up underwear is out of all proportion to the cost of the material. And the sewing of small silk garments is by no means arduous: they can be packed so easily into a case containing your scissors, needles, and other requisites, and taken about with you on informal visits, or picked up at any time in your own home to work on while you are talking. Fifteen pounds' worth of silk, lace and embroidery thread will provide you with as many nightdresses, bed-jackets, chemises, and knickers as would cost you about fifty pounds bought ready-made in materials of the same quality.

Any bride-to-be who carted partially-sewn knickers to informal gatherings today, might perhaps raise an eyebrow or two, but what the two lady authoresses had to say about pyjamas still seems valid: 'If men have one aversion that is fully and invariably justifiable, it is for the sight of a woman clad in pyjamas. (We are referring here to bedroom, not beach pyjamas.) Some women are misguided enough to wear pyjamas even on a honeymoon; it would be a bitterness to us to think that you were one of these.'

The standard etiquette book rule that 'the bride's father pays for the *trousseau*', now produces a hollow laugh from many a working girl; but no one doubts that it really is his job to provide the party, even if he goes bald and bankrupt in the process. In 1973, a secretary marrying an electrician estimated that her father would be

£500 the poorer after the festivity: 100 guests had been invited and food and champagne would come to about £3 a head; there was £23·50 for the photographer; £20 for the church (£4 fee for the service, then the organist and choir); £30 for the hall for the reception; £15 for the mobile discotheque which would provide the music; £5·61 for the printed invitations; and a whole lot more on things like 'serviettes and matches'. Her 'plain' dress was to cost about £35 and she was paying for her bridesmaid's, too — another £15. The bridegroom would be taking charge of the florist's bill: £8 for a bouquet for his bride and £3 for one for her bridesmaid; and the car hire: £8·50 each for two Austin Princess limousines for an hour. (And his friends kept telling him that at 26 he was 'too young to die'.)

There would also be the ring to buy and a gift for the bridesmaid from the bridegroom (lockets and bracelets are still popular) and for the bride (pearl necklaces have recently begun to wane). At the wedding reception there would be a speech to make — at a cost only to his nerves — but he might get out of that since speeches at weddings are going out of fashion and a simple toast to bride and bridegroom coming in. Even when there are no set speeches, the best man is still usually called on to read out the telegrams from friends who could not be there (and wits who are there but can never resist an opportunity to be publicly funny). Until recently, someone could generally be relied upon to send the hoary telegraphed hope that the only troubles to inflict the happy pair would be 'little ones', but that really must be too well known now to produce even a groan. At the 1906 wedding of U.S. Congressman Nicholas Longworth and Alice Lee Roosevelt (dashing daughter of President Theodore Roosevelt) an old friend cabled the bride: 'I always knew Old Nick would get you', which is as good a piece of wedding humour as any.

The cake is still the centrepiece of the feast, and small

pieces are mailed in little white boxes (with silver lettering and silver wedding bells and horseshoes on the top) to friends and relatives who could not attend. I've heard of people wishing on wedding cake, but not dreaming on it any more. Three tiers or more remain in vogue for grand weddings, the top tier (in theory if not in practice) to be kept for the first christening — except in the case of President's daughter, Luci Baines Johnson: her cake in 1966 had six tiers of 'summer fruit cake', decoratively iced, with sugar-icing arches and súgar-icing lilies-of-the-valley between each tier, and on the top, decorated with real lilies-of-the-valley, a small 'bride's cake' (chocolate flavour beneath the white frosting) which she took off with her on honeymoon to the Bahamas. While rich fruit mixtures topped with a layer of marzipan are traditional for all celebrations in Britain, the less solid sponge is more popular in America, and when the next President's daughter (Patricia Nixon) married, in 1971, the White House chef provided a more typically American lemon sponge mixture beneath all the icing. A scaled-down version of the exotic recipe (ten egg whites for a 12-inch cake) was released to the nation, to that in every home throughout the land, the very same brand of ambrosia could be savoured by every last American man, woman and child, on the great day. It was a happy thought, but something went wrong with the culinary calculations: eruptions of lemon lava gummed up cookers from coast to coast. There were tales of it hitting ceilings and flowing over floors; it was like soup on the outside, glue on the inside. A red-faced White House chef thought again, and produced amendments.

At the beginning of the century, a lucky wedding ring was sometimes baked into the cake. 'Bride Cuts the Cake; Sister Gets Ring; All Dance the Tango' announced a *Washington Post* headline when President Woodrow Wilson's second daughter, Jessie, deserted the 'Gilded Portals of the White House to Rule Humble Home as Mrs. Francis Bowes Sayre'.

In Britain, at the 1934 wedding of Princess Marina of Greece and Prince George, Duke of Kent (son of King George V and Queen Mary): 'Concealed in the large wedge cut from the lower tier at the wedding breakfast were seven charms of solid gold, representing respectively a wedding ring, thimble, bachelor's button, horse-shoe, dove, donkey, and threepenny bit.' Even compared with other royal wedding cakes, this one was spectacular. Made by Mr. Borella, of McVitie and Price — and said to be the thirty-third he had produced for royalty — it was 9 ft. tall, weighed 800 lbs., was decorated in 'semi-Greek' style and contained 'ingredients from Empire sources, with the addition of Greek currants sent to the bride by maidens of Greece'.

At less illustrious matches, the cake often bears handsome witness to the deeds of bride or groom. When cricketer Colin Cowdrey married in 1956, cricket bats, stumps and balls, 'all made of pure sugar' surrounded his three-tier cake, and the horseshoe on the top was worked with 'the same cricket motif'. (The chief pastry cook at the Lewisham store owned by the bride's father made the cake, which weighed 60 lbs., and contained 60 eggs, 4 lbs. of butter, 12 lbs, of marzipan, and 15 lbs, of dried fruit from that cricket-crazy country Australia.) In the same year, bandleader Ray Ellington's wedding cake was decorated with a miniature set of bongo drums and a packet of cornflakes made of sugar-icing — bride and bridegroom had met at Barnes television studios when he was recording a session with his quartette and she was doing a breakfast cereal advertisement; and in 1961, a certain author, who had shortly before declared to the press that he was married to his typewriter and intended to stay that way, found a white sugar typewriter on the top of his wedding cake when he decided to marry a woman after all.

Miniature figures of white-gowned bride, and morning-suited groom, top many a cake on both sides of the Atlantic, but, to use the jargon of the 20th century, they

are (like silver-printed invitation cards) non-U. Top cakes continue to be topped by small vases of fresh flowers.

The record for the greatest number of cakes ever prepared for any one wedding goes to the present Queen: twelve 'official cakes' were presented to her. When she married, in 1947, Britain was still weary and underfed after the Second World War; austerity was the word the country had to live with; and what food there was, was rationed. But the royal wedding was seen as a bright turning point, a hopeful pointer to better times ahead, and the people made it *their* wedding with heartening enthusiasm. Twelve baking firms prepared twelve gleaming tributes to the young Princess and 'the sailor bridegroom'. Huntley and Palmer's four-tier offering, with 'gracious permission of Her Royal Highness', was first put on show at a London store, to aid the Royal Naval Benevolent Fund. Peek, Frean's six-tier 'masterpiece of the confectioner's art' was staunchly British and naval: made from 'ingredients from all Commonwealth countries'; it was crowned with a magnificent sugar-icing St. George on his rearing charger, and had panels showing the Princess's arms, Glamis Castle, St. George's Chapel, Windsor, H.M.S. *Vanguard*, and the Royal Naval College, Dartmouth, with many an anchor and coiled rope in between. But, once again, it was McVitie and Price's offering which was chosen by the bride to be cut at the wedding reception, and, once again, the *Illustrated London News* had all the details:

> The cake, 9 ft. high and weighing 500 lb., was made with four tiers, supported by silver pillars, and decorated with the armorial bearings of Princess Elizabeth and Lieutenant Philip Mountbatten, R.N.; plaques modelled in sugar depicting Buckingham Palace, Windsor Castle and Balmoral; figures illustrating the sporting activities and interests of the bride and bridegroom; the crests of the Royal Naval and Grenadier Guards; the badges of the A.T.S., the Girl Guides and the Sea Rangers; and shields bearing monograms of the bridal couple.

Filigree sugar arches and canopies, with 'musical Cupids' beneath them, decorated the whole. On top was a solid silver vase of fresh roses, and more fresh roses were arranged around the base. Before the cake was presented to the Palace, a section was cut from the bottom tier, looped around with satin ribbon, replaced, the cracks iced over, and the ribbon tied in a bow outside to mark the spot. On the wedding day, using the ribbon as a guide, bride and groom had an easy task: two light strokes through the icing only, with the bridegroom's sword, and the whole wedge could be pulled clear by the bow.

Much was made of the fact that like 'any ordinary bride of a Naval officer, the Princess cut her cake with her husband's sword'. The sword itself was, however, rather more exalted than most, having originally belonged to the bridegroom's grandfather, Prince Louis of Battenberg, the first Marquis of Milford Haven and a former Admiral of the Fleet.

Both the bride's dress and this noble cake arrived at Buckingham Palace the day before the wedding. The gown had only a short journey — from Norman Hartnell's salon — which it made in a 4-foot long box, inside a green Board of Trade van; but the cake was given more spectacular treatment, travelling from Harlesden, North London, in a 'pantechnicon', escorted by a 'courtesy cop' on a motor-cycle, and followed by another van in case of accidents to the first.

The bride's home is still considered to be the most suitable place for a wedding reception, with hired caterers, extra staff, and a marquee on the lawn if necessary. Hotels are also popular in the middle ranks of society, and superior London clubs, which not so long ago barred their doors to the most modest female invasion, are now happy (financially, if in no other way) to open their reception rooms to wedding parties on Saturday afternoons and provide elegant food in extremely elegant surroundings. At the other

end of the middle class range come tennis clubs, which also hire out their facilities for the weddings of their members (and offer an appropriate setting for jokes about love matches).

Whatever the time of day, and whatever the kind of food provided, champagne is still the expected accompaniment. Searcy's, the great London caterers (whose name on the fluted pastry cases is a guarantee both of contented guests and a generous host), say its popularity never wavers: 'But most people have a bottle or so of whisky tucked away for those older men who can't take a fizzy drink.'

At the wedding of Franklin D. Roosevelt's youngest son in June 1938 a different kind of problem guest had to be catered for: 500 bottles of champagne (United Kingdom *cuvée*) and 12 gallons of temperance punch were provided for the 616 guests at the smart Nahant (Mass.) Tennis Club reception.

At the beginning of the century, according to one bride, quoted in *Brides* magazine, claret was the festive drink at working-class weddings. Describing her own 1912 marriage, she recalled: 'The reception was at home. We folded back the doors, and the trestles were groaning with roast meats and puddings. There were mountains of jellies and trifles. We drank claret then, never champagne.' On the way home from church, the wedding party was held up in the crowd, the bride in her long white dress and veil, carrying a great trailing bouquet; the bridegroom in best suit, starched white collar and carrying white gloves: 'all the people on top of one of the new open buses cheered'. Her 'going away suit was specially tailored in navy blue serge' and with it she wore a 'plum colour Breton hat with crossed wings of feathers at the back. This was a tribute to the new Royal Flying Corps. We left in a motor car and I was very anxious in case friends tied cans and boots to the back. I thought we were lucky but some of them distracted us by waving Kruger's ticklers in our faces so we didn't see them tying things on. Kruger's ticklers were big

curled ostrich feathers, nick-named during the Boer War, and popular then.'

Although marriages up till 6 p.m. have been legal since 1934, evening weddings have only recently come into favour, and even now, their popularity is limited mainly to London and other large cities. (The previous restriction to daylight hours only was a measure against skulduggery, and the extension was due more to the wide-spread use of electric light than to social pressure.) A late wedding allows guests to join in straight from work (and takes the load off Saturdays); but it can also mean that they arrive looking businesslike rather than festive, and keep checking the time of the last train home.

In the 1950s, when most of my friends were getting married, between 2.30 and 3.30 on a Saturday afternoon was the most popular time. After the half-hour service in a church decorated (but, as a rule, not particularly lavishly) with white flowers, an odd mixture of sandwiches, cocktail savouries, cakes and champagne was served at the bride's home or a nearby hotel. There were always lots of aunts with moist eyes saying they had always known the dear girl would 'make a lovely bride', and lots of strange faces 'from the other side'; the bride was regularly kissed in best wedding tradition, and the bridegroom, who had often had a bet with a friend as to who would 'get caught' first, ruefully paid up. Bride and bridegroom left after an hour-and-a-half or two hours, and the party swiftly lost impetus. The parents of either the bride or groom had often organised a quiet dinner party for their own contemporaries for later in the evening, but arrangements for the young were more chancy. It was always the hope, and aim, to drift on from the wedding reception to dinner and dancing at some other establishment, the men still dressed (against all the rules of etiquette) in their black morning coats and pin-striped trousers, with carnations in their buttonholes. If this failed, there was nothing more desolate than to be young, full of champagne and on your way home at 6 p.m.

Occasionally, there were morning weddings followed by a luncheon served at small round tables in a marquee on the lawn, everyone sitting on spindly gold chairs (supplied by the caterers) which looked particularly elegant in the out-door setting. Full-blown wedding breakfasts, with long, white-draped tables arranged like a city banquet, went out of favour with the Second World War.

Most fun of all were long-distance events. These involved staying at least one night in the bridal house, or an annexe provided by nearby relatives or friends. Then, there was usually a party the night before the wedding (often given by a married sister of the bride) and the occasion took on the atmosphere of the three- and four-day festivities of the old — and the saying that one wedding leads to another was given plenty of romantic opportunity to come true.*

There haven't been too many instances of whole villages and towns putting out the flags and triumphal arches for weddings this century, but it does still happen. Romsey in Hampshire was very much *en fête* in January 1960 when Earl Mountbatten of Burma's daughter, Lady Pamela Mountbatten, married Mr. David Hicks. The main streets were lined with banners and bunting, and if it had not been for a persistent snowstorm, there would have been a bridal procession on foot from Romsey Abbey where the ceremony took place. There were two receptions afterwards: one for the 'Royal party and the principal guests' at Broadlands, the bride's home, and another at a hall in the town for 'tenants and staff'. The bride and some of the royal guests divided their time between the two, and an 11-year-old Prince Charles charmed the tenants and staff by taking over from his bridesmaid sister, Princess Anne, and straightening the bride's train as she entered the hall. (Lady Pamela had 'had the unusual and delightful idea of wearing white mink on her wedding dress'.) Nearly forty years earlier Lady Pamela's parents

* 'One Wedding, the Proverb says, begets another' — John Gay, *Wife of Bath*, 1713.

had had a spectacular marriage themselves, with the then Prince of Wales (later King Edward VIII) as best man and sailors instead of horses to pull the bridal carriage from church to reception.

For humbler weddings, the church hall has been the most popular setting for the feast throughout the century, usually with caterers providing the food. Higher up, Assembly Rooms sometimes make a grand setting for a grand affair — like the marriage of the Earl of Dalkeith in January 1953. This was the first major social event of Coronation Year, and the new Queen, Elizabeth II, was present — the first time, it was said, that a British sovereign had attended a wedding in Scotland since 'the Union of the two crowns'. The ceremony took place in St. Giles' Cathedral, Edinburgh, with music composed especially for the occasion by the cathedral organist and choirmaster, and Isobel Baillie to sing Mozart's *Laudate Dominum*. Afterwards, the guests left, between pipers of the City Police pipe band (wearing kilts and bearskins), for 'a reception in the Assembly Rooms, George Street, where, in addition to the Royal guests, some 1600 people were entertained'.

The very first year of this century saw one of the most spectacular non-royal weddings there can ever have been. The bride was Clara Butt (later to be made Dame Clara Butt), a 27-year-old from Bristol with a contralto singing voice of alarming depth. She received the kind of dizzy acclaim reserved for pop-stars today – and even they don't warrant a half-holiday for all the factories, shops and offices in their home towns when they marry.

The bridegroom was another singer: 30-year-old baritone, Robert Kennerley Rumford, a favourite of Queen Victoria. He wooed Miss Butt with songs, and pencilled little notes in the margins of her music — sometimes such embarrassing little notes that, having opened the score in a public place, such as Paddington Station, she snapped it

fast shut again (even though Mr. Rumford's language of love was German). He proposed to her while they were singing a duet called *The Keys of Heaven*, and they left the concert platform engaged to be married.

In the words of her biographer, Winifred Ponder: 'Clara Butt was paid the supreme honour of the offer of St. Paul's Cathedral for her wedding — an honour almost unprecedented for a commoner; but she refused it, in order to be married in Bristol, among her own people and friends of her girlhood. The Dean of Bristol then came forward with the offer of Bristol Cathedral (in which only one wedding had previously taken place within a century) for the ceremony. An offer she accepted and the day was fixed for Tuesday 26 June 1900.'

There were special trains to and from London; the Cathedral was 'crammed with Duchesses, prima donnas, and what not', church bells pealed throughout the city, and the crowd which had started to gather before 7 a.m. for the 1.30 ceremony, grew so dense the police had to clear a way for the trams to get through. Hundreds of presents rolled in, including one from Queen Victoria. (Bristol's gift was a brooch with the initials CB — standing conveniently both for Clara Butt and the City of Bristol — shot through with a ruby arrow.) Sir Arthur Sullivan composed an anthem (*O God thou art worthy to be praised*) and Madame Albani sang it. Dame Nellie Melba, Clara Novello Davies (mother of Ivor Novello), Forbes Robertson, and many another famous singer, sat in the choir stalls and added even greater lustre to the Cathedral choir.

There were six bridesmaids, three of them sisters of the bride, and two pages. The wedding dress, of heavy crêpe de Chine trimmed with a deep silk fringe, was made by Madame Wyatt of Clifford Street, who had made the bride's most popular concert gown — her famous 'grape dress'. (When booked for a return concert, Clara Butt was often asked to wear the gown she had worn the time before, and in Australia, both she and her 'grape dress'

were engaged over and over again.) Twenty-five years later, the white fringed crêpe de Chine was remodelled for the now Dame Clara's silver wedding concert. As her biographer said: 'It is an interesting example of how mere redrapery can bring a long-out-dated gown back into fashion. In this case the skirt portion was simply taken out of the waist and draped from the shoulder.' In charge of the redraping was 'Lucille' (otherwise known as Lady Duff Gordon).

In America the tradition that a bride should wear her wedding dress again for the 25th anniversary lives on. One anguished look at what a quarter of a century has done to the waistline usually vetoes the idea, but an American friend tells me she has seen it done — 'though mostly by gals without daughters!' Alice Lee Roosevelt Longworth (daughter of President Theodore Roosevelt) was one bride who had no trouble following the tradition, though she chose to wear a favourite *trousseau* gown (yellow satin with brilliants at the waist and down the front) rather than the wedding dress itself for her silver wedding in 1931, and she had her hair upswept in the same Edwardian style she had worn for the marriage ceremony in February 1906 — a ceremony which was said to have been the most lavish in the history of the White House, and the most publicised.

Alice Lee Roosevelt had been a racey young lady — she smoked cigarettes; it was said that she even drank cocktails; and she had definitely been seen wearing riding breeches out at Rock Creek Park. All that, and beauty too, made her a journalist's dream. The press converged on Washington from all over the world to cover her wedding, and the following day the *Washington Post* devoted its entire front page to the event. She was one of the handful of presidential daughters who have been awarded the mostly affectionate title of 'Princess', and, as is fitting in royal circles, she received some noble gifts: King Edward VII of Great Britain sent a gold and blue enamelled snuff box with his miniature on it; the Kaiser

sent a bracelet with his miniature on it; King Victor Emmanuel of Italy sent an enormous mosaic table, without his miniature on it; and the Dowager Empress of China gave a generous mixed bag of eight rolls of gold brocade worked with the Chinese sign of longevity, white jade, a pair of earrings, two finger rings, and two fur coats — one of white fox, the other ermine. The French government presented a Gobelin tapestry, and the Republic of Cuba (where the honeymoon was to be spent) sent a $20,000-pearl necklace — sixty-two matched pearls with a diamond clasp — as much in gratitude to the President for his help in Cuba's war with Spain as in tribute to his daughter.

Six-hundred-and-eighty guests were present for the ceremony; seventy-two policemen were on duty outside, and the Marine band, brilliant in scarlet and gold, played wedding music in the hall. There were no bridesmaids and no small page boys at this wedding: just Alice and firm masculine support. A few minutes before noon, a military *aide* led the Episcopal Bishop of Washington, between lines of satin ribbon, to the altar set, against the east windows of the East Room, in a bower of palms, smilax and Easter lilies. They were followed by the bridegroom, the 36-year-old Congressman from Ohio, Nicholas Longworth, and his best man. On the stroke of twelve, with the band playing the arch from Wagner's *Tannhauser*, eight ushers escorted the bride and her father up the green-carpeted aisle to join them.

The wedding dress had been made in New York — like the rest of the *trousseau* — and was magnificent: cream satin, with an 18-foot long train of silver brocade. The neckline and wide, ruffled, elbow-length sleeves were trimmed with lace from the wedding gown of the bride's mother (who had died twenty-two years earlier — two days after the bride was born). A wreath of orange blossom and a tulle veil (kept very much to the back of the head) completed the outfit. As she stepped up to the altar, Alice Roosevelt handed her large and trailing orchid bou-

quet to her father, and left the straightening of her train to her cousin, Franklin Delano Roosevelt (who, having married only the year before, understood such things).

In regal style, 'Princess' Alice entertained her own intimate friends to a wedding breakfast in the family dining-room, while less honoured guests were feasted in the State Dining-room. Never one to quit a party that had some life left in it, this bride left *after* her guests. At 4.30 p.m., the Congressman and his lady, dressed in beige, drove to a mansion on the outskirts of Washington, which had been lent to them for the first few days of the honeymoon. Later, they sailed for Cuba.

Alice Roosevelt's gown of cream and silver could well have started a fashion trend, for five years later, on the other side of the Atlantic, the *Bradford Wedding Journal* (August 1911) high-lighted the popularity of these two colours in a round-up of news from the recent wedding season:

Out of Date

Bridal white seems to be almost extinct, so rarely does one now see the old style of dead white wedding gown and the usual bouquet of pure white flowers.

Easily Held

Miss Margaret Glyn carried a prayer book instead of the usual bouquet but of course she is the daughter of a bishop.

Silver the Rage

During the London season just closed, silver, in the form of brocade, wreaths etc. has been much employed in bridal costumes which have largely been designed in the mediaeval style, generally in white brocade. Black, which superstition would not at one time allow to be seen at a wedding, has been frequently used in hats. Indeed it is quite evident that the bride of today does not possess that fear of superstition which her grandmother had.

Silver, having made a come-back for bridal trimming,

remained popular for another fifty years. Many royal wedding dresses, like that of the Queen Mother, have been embroidered with silver, while Princess Marina wore a sheath of brocade more silver than white; and, in 1922, Princess Mary (only daughter of King George V) and all her bridesmaids shimmered with a silvery light:

The scheme of Princess Mary's wedding cortège was white and silver. Not only was the bride's dress woven of silver and sewn with pearls and diamonds, but her eight bridesmaids wore gowns of glistening silver. Their head-dresses were wreaths of silver leaves with diamanté centres, over veils of white tulle. (*Illustrated London News.*)

Silver lamé was another favourite of the Twenties, and white lace embroidered with silver thread was popular in the 1950s.

The urge to bring black into the wedding picture was determined but short-lived. In 1901 when the daughter of the Secretary for War, Mr. St. John Brodrick, married Lord Tweedmouth's son, the Hon. Dudley Marjoribanks, at St. George's, Hanover Square, *The Tatler* reported that the bridesmaids wore white with black picture hats and carried bouquets of violets; and a week or so later the writer of 'My Lady's Mirror', in the same magazine, described a fashionable bridesmaid's ensemble as made by 'Mesdames Hancock & James, Grafton Street';

The bridesmaid's gown was of white mousseline de soie over pale green glacé silk, trimmed with transparent ecru insertion, the tucked bolero, which opened over the soft full front of the mousseline being edged with insertion and lace. Sleeves distinguished by wide volants over little tucked manchettes and a green silk belt supplied the all important finishing touch. As might have been expected, just now, a huge granny muff with a bunch of real lilies-of-the-valley and a wide frill on one side of pale green silk with ruches of silk and black lace, replaced the conventional bouquet and the hat was a charming confection of silk and lace with a triple brim adorned with lace ruches and a black ostrich feather falling over the hair.

Another 'fashion writer' (quoted in C. W. Cunnington's *English Women's Clothing in the Present Century*) said that the spring season of 1901 had 'been productive of several innovations in wedding ceremonies. It has redeemed black, once and for all, from its reproach in its function as a wedding garment, Lady —, that recent bride, setting a seal on this by gowning her bridesmaids in picturesque black frocks.'

Three years later, at the society wedding of the 1904 winter season, at least one of the one thousand guests wore black. This was the marriage of Lady Marjorie Greville, daughter of the exquisite Daisy, Countess of Warwick (friend of King Edward VII — and others), which took place at Warwick Castle in January 1904. On 30 January, the 'Ladies' Page' of the *Illustrated London News* described what everyone wore, except, curiously, the bride. The beautiful Countess, heavily pregnant in suspicious circumstances, was in velvet — 'a long wide coat of creamy tint' trimmed with 'an abundance of lovely lace and worn with a sable stole and a hat of pale-brown gathered chiffon trimmed with shaded ostrich feathers, it was an enhancement of her dress of striped satin gauze, with yoke of point d'Alençon embroidered with silver'. The bridegroom's mother, the Countess of Feversham, 'chose a rather bright shade of green relieved by a lace vest, and a green hat with pink velvet and violets for trimming'. Theresa, Countess of Shrewsbury, 'had a handsome grey velvet gown with a cape of the same; and Lady Maitland was in black velvet.' The bridesmaids (there were fourteen of them) had 'rich red velvet "early Victorian" scarves, and rosettes of the same material on their wide hats of white beaver' as a 'happy addition to the soft pure white of their satin and chiffon dresses'. The few guests who did not wear velvet 'patronised soft, supple face-cloths'.

The daughter of another friend of King Edward VII, Sonia Keppel (whose mother Mrs. George Keppel brought joy and stability to the later years of the amorous monarch's life) was also given a grand society wedding. In

1918, at the age of 18, Sonia had fallen in love with Roland Cubitt, fourth son of Lord Ashcombe. (The three older Cubitt boys all died in action during the First World War and so Roland, against all the odds and his own expectations, was by then his father's heir.) There was some strong Ashcombe opposition to the match; then, as Sonia Keppel was to tell in her autobiography:

Sometime during the spring of 1920 Rolie's parents decided that we had crossed the borderline from adolescence into maturity and, after nearly two years of waiting and hoping, we became officially engaged, with our wedding planned to take place in the autumn.

We had been 'unofficially' engaged for so long that the formal announcement only seemed a question of sticking on fresh labels. But now we were allowed to dine alone together and to motor down alone to stay with friends, which seemed to me as emancipated as it was delightful.

Rolie gave me a half-hoop ring of a ruby and two diamonds, and a little diamond Coldstream star to pin into my hat. I gave him some 'engagement' cuff-links; we gave each other photographs; and the future seemed but a vista of exchanging presents to confirm our love.

The *trousseau*, ordered by 'Mamma', was formidable:

... three dozen night-gowns, petticoats, bodices, chemises, knickers, stockings, handkerchiefs, gloves. A dozen pairs of evening and day shoes; six pairs of stays. I had a pink satin peignoir, trimmed with ostrich feathers, for summer; and a quilted blue velvet dressing-gown, with a real Valenciennes lace collar, for winter. (At last Nannie was satisfied.) As, now, I was to be married in November, I had two evening dresses suited to winter: a black velvet square-necked ball dress, and a pink velvet ball dress trimmed with silver lace. (My wedding gown, of silver lamé, was to act as my presentation gown the following summer.) I had two tea-gowns, one trimmed with Chinese embroidery, and the other of billowing chiffon; three day dresses and three afternoon dresses; and three tweed suits and a travelling coat, with matching hats and jerseys and shirts. My going-away dress

was of pale blue marocaine, with a skirt cut into petals, topped by a black velvet coat with a grey fox collar, and a grey cap trimmed with ospreys.

The presents began to arrive and, foremost among them, an heirloom from Mamma in the shape of Nannie, bequeathed to me as a lady's maid. (I felt dreadfully disloyal, but a trifle dubious, as Rolie's and my combined ages fell short of Nannie's by nearly thirty years.) Next in importance from Mamma came a diamond tiara; and an emerald and diamond pendant; and an enchanting eighteenth century diamond brooch in the shape of a sheaf of wheat. And Papa gave me a piano and a Georgian writing-table; and Violet and Denys gave me two crystal and diamond hat-pins; and Rolie's parents gave me a turquoise and diamond pendant; and Rolie himself gave me a bigger ring and a bigger Coldstream badge. Uncle Arnold and Aunt Gertie gave me a Georgian sideboard; and Uncle Archie and Aunt Ida gave me some nineteenth century gilt candlesticks. Mamma's friends coughed up nobly: Maggie [*Mrs. Ronald Greville — Sonia's godmother*], with an emerald ring; the Grand Duke Michael [*her godfather*] and Countess Torby with a Fabergé snuff-box; Stavy and Lady Ilchester, with a huge aquamarine and diamond brooch; Sir Ernest Cassel, with a fat cheque. (When this arrived, to my disappointment, Mamma said that cheques were vulgar, so it had to be transformed into a long stole and muff of Canadian sables, which I did not particularly want.) Marshalled by Marjorie Jessel eighty of my girl friends gave me a breakfast, dinner and tea service of Spode china; nearly all my boy friends gave me individual presents; and my dentist appositely gave me a tiger's tooth, attached to a bell. Rolfe [*the family butler*] and all the house servants gave me a silver salver, and almost best of all I loved Nannie's two toast-racks with each strut spelling a letter of 'Rolie' and 'Sonia', in silver plate. And Rolie too had an impressive array, from his family; from his friends; from his father's tenants. Every purse within reach seemed to have been opened for us, to line our future home in the nicest way.

A year earlier, when Sonia's elder sister married, the music had been one of the greatest features of the wedding, with Dame Nellie Melba singing Gounod's *Ave Maria* as the

register was signed, and 'an organist of great talent' playing Purcell's *Trumpet Voluntary* for the entrance of the bride and Wagner's *Bridal Chorus* for her exit. Music has also been a particularly impressive — and imaginative — feature of royal weddings this century, and, in most cases, it is the bride who has been given the credit. When the present Queen married in 1947, much was made in the press of the many personal consultations she had had over the pieces to be played and sung, and how many of them were her own personal choice. The inclusion of the 'Scottish metrical version of the 23rd Psalm', 'delighted Scotland', and produced much speculation: by some it was seen as 'a tribute to the impression made upon her at services in that country when she heard the version sung to the Scots tune of "Crimond" '; others decided she had made the choice 'because she learned the Psalm as a baby from her Scottish mother'.

Before the arrival of the bride, Dr. Osborne H. Peasgood, sub-organist of Westminster Abbey, played a sonata by Elgar, Widor's *Cantabile*, Bach's exquisite *Jesu, Joy of Man's Desiring*, and selections from Handel's *Water Music*. The Princess walked up the aisle, on the arm of her father, King George VI, to Parry's *Bridal March and Finale*, and was the last British princess to walk down the aisle again to the sound of Mendelssohn.

Rebecca West, reporting the occasion from the organ loft of the Abbey, was particularly moved by the fanfares, which had been composed for the ceremony by Sir Arnold Bax, Master of the King's Musick. After writing much about post-war austerity, evident even within the Abbey, she said: 'at last the fanfare of trumpets was heard which greeted the bride as she arrived . . . It was like a shower of shooting stars in a winter sky expressed in sound . . . and it added to the wedding a luxury greater than all the money the most fortunate country could have bought for a child of the head of its State.'

Thirteen years later, 'magnificent fanfares' were also composed for Princess Margaret — this time by Sir

Arthur Bliss, who had succeeded Bax as Master of the Queen's Musick — and, as at her sister's wedding, they were played by the trumpeters of the Royal Military School of Music. Princess Margaret made the not-too-usual choice of walking to the altar while the choir sang a hymn — *Christ is made the sure foundation.* During the service the 23rd Psalm was sung once more, but this time, by special desire of the bride, to Schubert's setting. While the register was being signed in the small chapel of St. Edward the Confessor, two more anthems — by William Byrd and Gustav Holst — were sung. Another of the splendid trumpet fanfares sounded as bride and bridegroom returned to the Sacrarium, and as that died away, Purcell's gay *Trumpet Tune and Airs* took over for the procession down the aisle.

In 1923, when the mother of these two royal brides married, *The Times* said of the music: 'The dominant note will be one of cheerfulness, and that which is obscure or complicated on the one hand, or weakly sentimental on the other, will be avoided.' The result was a pleasant mixture of the old and fairly new: pieces by Purcell, the minuet from Handel's overture to *Berenice*, Saint-Saëns' *Benediction nuptiale* were all played before the ceremony, and, as her younger daughter was to do, the bride chose to enter to the sound of the choir rather than the organ. As Lady Elizabeth Bowes-Lyon, the present Queen Mother walked up the aisle to the hymn *Lead us, Heavenly Father, lead us*; as the Duchess of York, she made the return journey to Mendelssohn's *Wedding March*, and 'proceeded to the West door of the Abbey' to *Marcia Eroica*, which had 'just appeared from the pen of Sir C. V. Stanford'.

The Times made no claim that it had just appeared from the pen of the seventy-year-old composer for this purpose, and, most probably, it had not. Curiously little music has been commissioned for royal weddings, and apart from the fanfares only one other piece appears to have been written specifically for a royal bride this

century: an anthem, *Beloved, let us love one another*, which was first sung at the marriage of Princess Mary (only daughter of King George V) in 1922, and was again featured the following year, at the wedding of her brother, the Duke of York.

A royal bride thought to be particularly well qualified to supervise her own wedding music, was Miss Katherine Worsley, who married the Duke of Kent in June 1961. The Queen Mother, the Queen and Princess Margaret had all been described as 'accomplished pianists' at the time of their marriages. Miss Worsley was said to be 'an accomplished musician'. The wedding took place in York Minster and the music was a match for the magnificent surroundings. The bride walked to the altar to Parry's *Laudate Dominum*, and in one of those nice gestures at which royalty — even royalty by marriage — are so good, the first anthem sung was *I sat down under His shadow*, by Sir Edward Bairstow, a former organist of the Minster. Gustav Holst's setting of Psalm 148 and his *Alleluia* were also sung, and the *Toccata* from Widor's Fifth Symphony was played for the final procession of the bride and bridegroom. (The same *Toccata*, followed by William Walton's *Crown Imperial*, was also played at the marriage of the Duke of Kent's sister, Princess Alexandra, two years later.) A splendid musical flourish to the Duke of Kent's wedding was described by the *Illustrated London News:*

When the newly-married pair came out together from the Minster, the rain which had fallen during the ceremony had ceased and the sun shone on the Duke and Duchess as they emerged through the arches of swords of the guard of honour from the Duke's own regiment, The Royal Scots Greys, and two pipers played the Scots folk tune, 'I hae a wife of my own'.

In America, Luci Baines Johnson was another bride who took particular interest in the music for her wedding — and again, the result was both impressive and

original. This magnificent 'private family affair' took place in the spanking-new National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception, Washington: the largest Catholic Church in the United States (capacity 3,500 plus). It was the first wedding to be celebrated there, and Luci Baines Johnson was the first presidential daughter to be married anywhere but in a private house — the White House or otherwise. One more first, was the fact that she was the only daughter of a President ever to be married at a Catholic ceremony (having left the Episcopalian Church and been baptised into the Catholic faith when she was 18). For an hour before the noon wedding, the fifty-six-bell carillon, in the slender tower above the Shrine, heralded the event: Purcell's *Trumpet Tune and Airs,* Haydn's lovely *St. Anthony Chorale*, Massenet's *The Angelus*, pieces by Handel, Bach, Tallis and the first performance of Franco's *Pronunciamento for Carillon*, were played from a giant keyboard within the building. Shortly after twelve o'clock, with the 700 guests assembled, the organist, Robert F. Twynham, played his own *Paraphrase on a Trumpet Tune by Henry Purcell,* and the bridal procession began.

First of all the eleven 'groomsmen' (wearing morning suits, cravats and white roses in the buttonholes of their 'cutaway' coats) walked up the aisle, followed by the bridegroom, Patrick Nugent (in morning suit, cravat and a small sprig of lily-of-the-valley) with his father (standing in as proxy best man for the bridegroom's brother, away on active duty in Vietnam). Next came a line of nine bridesmaids, one matron-of-honour, and one maid-of-honour, Lynda Bird Johnson, sister of the bride — all walking in single-file and all wearing different shades of pink with long fine tulle veils tinted to match. (Nieman Marcus's emporium in Dallas, Texas, supplied the dresses, and Mr. Marcus himself suggested the choice.) Then came the 'ring bearer', 5-year-old Lyndon Hand (dressed in a smart white suit with long white socks), keeping up nobly with the others. Following him, at a more

individual pace, was a single flower girl, of equally small size, in a long white dress and carrying a basket of flowers designed for decoration rather than strewing. Finally, on the arm of President Johnson, the bride appeared, wearing a slender gown of white Alençon lace, decorated with seed pearls, a three-yard train of matching lace flowing from her shoulders, and a starched, short and bouncy, tulle veil framing her dark hair. (The high neck of her dress was described as 'wedding band style', while the slightly lower, padded necklines of the bridesmaids' gowns were said to be 'wedding ring style'.)

With honest Texan belief in sheer size, two choirs were chosen to sing at this wedding in place of the usual soloist: 150 men and boys from Baltimore made memorable music within the great Shrine as they sand Bach's *Jesu, Joy of Man's Desiring*, Cesar Franck's setting of the 150th Psalm, and, by special request of the bride, one Episcopalian hymn: Ralph Vaughan Williams's *King's Weston.*

Representative Hale Boggs of Louisiana, a Johnson family friend as well as a member of Congress, read from Chapter Five of the *Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Ephesians:* 'Wives should be submissive to their husbands as though to the Lord; because the husband is head of the wife just as Christ is head of the Church . . .' and a budding army of Women's Liberationists (this was only 1966) tore at their bras in outrage.

The Pope, who had met both bride and bridegroom when he visited New York the previous autumn, sent his blessing, and his personal message, praying for 'abundant heavenly favour in their married life', was read out by Archbishop O'Boyle at the end of the nuptial Mass.

Bride and groom then led the procession back down the aisle, and rode in a 'bubble-top limousine' to the White House for the reception. As usual on these occasions, the Executive Mansion was a blaze of flowers (a team had stayed up all night arranging them both at the White House and the Shrine). A pink-lined canopy — its poles

and ropes entwined with pink and white carnations — had been placed over the Jacqueline Kennedy Garden to protect guests from the hot August sun, and it was here that they gathered before filing along a corridor lined with white petunias and pink geraniums to the Blue Room and the reception line — which included Mrs. Alice Lee Roosevelt Longworth, the White House bride of 1906, still sparkling and elegant at 82.

There were buffets in the East Room and the State Dining-room, and Peter Duchin's orchestra to dance to. Later in the afternoon, Luci stood on the South Balcony in her shocking pink going-away outfit, and threw her bouquet to her elder sister, Lynda Bird, while her then Hollywood beau, George Hamilton, looked on. There was 'a secret getaway' to a secret 'honeymoon hideaway' which later turned out to be a luxurious beachside villa in the Bahamas, lent by millionairess Rebekah Harkness Kean.

The next presidential daughter to marry was Patricia Nixon: tiny, blonde and, once more, given the title 'Princess'. She chose a ten-minute Episcopalian ceremony in the rose garden of the White House in June 1971, at which music had little chance to shine. But earlier in the century, at the weddings of two of President Woodrow Wilson's daughters, and two of President Franklin D. Roosevelt's sons, all the brides walked up the aisle to Wagner's march from *Lohengrin*, and down again to Mendelssohn's *Wedding March* — the two pieces which still mean weddings to most of us.

In search for something 'unusual', some good music has been chosen, some disastrous, but the prize for the most surprising must surely go to an English bride of the 1930s who walked down the aisle to the march from Berlioz's *The Damnation of Faust*. She was a music teacher, liked the piece and thought, appropriately, to hell with its associations. At a more recent wedding, I joined the rest of the congregation in singing the hymn which begins 'He who would true valour see, Let him come hither', and

listened to my husband muttering: 'They might just as well have had *Fight the Good Fight*, and be done with it!'

As incidental music for the feast, the military band and light operatic selections have had a tough time in recent years. Pop groups and travelling discotheques have been hired for some of the noblest liaisons in Britain, while the majority of weddings are musicless after the church service. However, I know of one 1973 summer marriage, in the enchanting little village of Ewelme in Oxfordshire, here the bride and groom and all the guests wandered back from the church on foot, leaving the drivers of the big, black, white-ribboned limousines disconsolately bereft of custom at the porch, to find a melodious old barrel organ grinding away on the lawn. The bride's father had originally suggested hiring the local brass band, but his wife and daughter had murmured about the hazards of hot weather — they always play in their braces'. And the highlight of the nicest wedding I went to in 1972 was the appearance of a small, light-hearted group of madrigal singers, of which the bride had been a member. In younger days, it was always a great comfort to find a certain forlorn-looking trio (piano, accordion and double bass — with other instruments on the side) installed for the reception: they played at the dances we all went to, and their presence was taken as a sign that though time was passing and friends were falling by the wayside, some things quite obviously went on for ever.

The eternal wedding tune then was *The Girl that I Marry*, from Irving Berlin's *Annie Get Your Gun*, with Robert Wright and George Forrest's romantic songs from *Kismet* following hard behind: dancing dreamily to *Younger than Springtime* helped many more bridesmaids to wedding rings of their own than catching the bridal bouquet ever did, and 'Hold my hand, I'm a stranger in Paradise . . .' from the same show, was almost as potent and just as certain to appear in the repertoire.

Irving Berlin's ideal bride wore a gardenia in her hair

('And I'll be there . . .') which was a break with tradition suited to the times, for after leading the field for more than a century, orange blossom began to lose ground in the 1950s, and royal brides changed their allegiance back to the more solid glory of jewels even earlier than that. The present Queen Mother was the last major royal bride to wear flowers rather than diamonds. For her wedding to the then Duke of York (son of King George V), in April 1923, she wore a typically hideous 1920s arrangement: a veil clamped down over her head to the eyebrows and firmly held there by a garotte — in this case, a narrow band of myrtle leaves with two white roses and sprigs of orange blossom above each ear. At the next marriage of a son of George V, the Duke of Kent's bride, the exquisitely elegant Princess Marina of Greece ('she has that polish which living in Paris gives to a woman') wore a diamond fringe tiara — straight bars of gems graduating like the rays of the sun. That was in 1934, and it set the fashion for all future royal brides — and many non-royal ones, too. The makers of bridal headdresses were quick to bring out 'costume jewellery' crowns, coronets and tiaras for girls with no access to the real thing, and these are still worn, though the present cult of honesty in everything and a return to the simplicity of Nature has brought fresh flowers back into fashion to rival them. In 1971 and '72, large floppy hats (and no veil) were popular, and before that, the women's magazines backed peasant-style three cornered handkerchiefs, with non-peasant-style ruffles round the edges.

One 1973 bride who had no difficulty in deciding what she should wear was Miss Mari Prichard, daughter of Welsh poet and writer, Caradog Prichard: she chose one of her father's three Bardic crowns — the one he won for his poem called *The Wedding*.

It was in the 1960s according to a 'London wedding wear expert' (quoted in the *Daily Mail*, 15 October 1971) that orange blossom really began to disappear and brides 'moved on to one artificial rose stuck on top of six yards of

tulle — what we call the "miner's lamp" in the business. Early 1971 fashions, he said, had been influenced by the extraordinary success of two television series, based on the lives of Henry VIII and Queen Elizabeth I, but that was passing: 'We're just getting over the Tudor bit, thank God. I'm absolutely sick of dressing brides to look like Elizabeth R, or one of the beheaded wives of Henry VIII.'

Tapping another cult, two years later, Young's, 'Britain's biggest bridal hire firm', introduced a collection of 'horoscope dresses'. For Taurus brides (21 April–21 May) the result was a frilly milk-maid number — the nearest they thought their customers would like to get to a bull.

Both Young's and Moss Bros (who hire out clothes for the bride as well as the bridegroom) say girls who go to them are prepared to pay an average of £20 — and hire rather than buy because they want to look 'romantic' on their wedding day. (For a £20 rental charge, a girl gets a gown which would sell at £100, say Moss Bros.) The most expensive dress Young's ever hung on their racks was 'the original copy of Princess Alexandra's wedding dress, which cost us £435'. Both firms say that business is booming. Young's, who started up in 1949, were pleased to report that the figures for the first few months of 1973 were up '30 per cent against last year's increase of 21 per cent' and that brides were demanding more 'elaborate and costly dresses. In fact dresses which normally retail for £60 or under, remain unhired.' Fifty per cent of their clients also hire the dresses for their bridesmaids. Their advertising is based on the idea that by hiring, a bride can 'get beautifully married for half the price'. 'There are two ways to be outstandingly elegant on your wedding day', they say. 'One is to be rich. The other is to be clever . . . You might very well get rich later. But right now, be clever.'

Brides who feel currently rich enough to ignore this advice and decide to buy their wedding dresses are usually

torn between choosing something which is so perfect for the event it will never look right for anything else, or compromising with a dress which will look good, though not marvellous, at the altar, yet can be turned into an evening gown afterwards. The compromise is rarely successful; there is nearly always something about the dress, and the girl inside it, which shrieks bride for ever more, no matter what the alterations or how many trips it has made to the dyers. In the 1950s when strapless evening dresses were in fashion, brides and bridesmaids often wore these boned and bare constructions under a chaste jacket or bolero of matching material. It was a good idea, but it never looked right. Strapless dresses had an unfortunate habit of drooping or sticking out at an odd angle, and when covered with the jacket could make the most upstanding young woman look like an over-endowed matron.

There is a superstition that an old veil is luckier than a new one, and that luckiest of all is a borrowed veil, especially if on loan from someone who has been happily married, or from a member of the bride's own family. But superstition is no match for fashion, and as crisp, fresh tulle has been in vogue for wedding veils during most of this century, crisp, fresh tulle is what most brides have worn. In the Twenties, it was clamped over the forehead and fell to the hem of the gown, or, when the skirt was short, sometimes formed a train. During World War II when dresses, of necessity, were often short, the veil was sometimes no more than shoulder-length and attached to a hat. In the Fifties, with the arrival of nylon, a more bouncy effect was achieved, and very full, waist-length veils became popular. Now there is a demand for 'two-tier' or 'three-layered' veils: the bottom tier or layer forming a train; the second adding body to the mid-section, and the third short and full to frame the face and to be worn over it for the arrival at church. (And just to prove there is no new fashion under the sun, it is exactly the

same arrangement as that worn by Ethel du Pont in Delaware in June 1937, when she married Franklin D. Roosevelt, Jr. Then, fastened to a tiny Juliet cap of orange blossoms, she had three layers of white tulle, one ten feet long, one six feet long, and the other three feet — all edged with silver thread. Like Patricia Nixon, the 1971 bride, she also wore elbow-length mittens to match her dress.)

Some brides, however, lucky enough to have a lace heirloom in the family, do choose to wear it on their wedding day. In 1904, Princess Alice of Albany, a granddaughter of Queen Victoria, borrowed the much criticised veil — the 'elongated lappet' — which Princess May of Teck had worn in 1893, and her mother, the Duchess of Teck, in 1866. (The bridegroom at this wedding was Princess May's youngest brother, Prince Alexander, later Earl of Athlone.)

In 1923, Princess May — by then Queen Mary — lent another family veil to her daughter-in-law-to-be, the Lady Elizabeth Bowes-Lyon, when she married the future King George VI. This was a much larger affair, of old *point de Flandres*, which had aged to a soft ivory colour, and the silk crêpe moiré for the wedding dress was dyed to tone with it.

Since then most royal brides have worn veils designed and made to match their dresses, though Princess Alexandra combined old and new by having her newly-woven wedding veil trimmed with a wide border of Valenciennes lace which had belonged to her grandmother, the Russian-born Princess Nicholas of Greece.

In wartime, the borrowing of a veil often became not a matter of choice or superstition, but one of necessity. As with many things in life, the great white wedding is usually longed for most when it is most difficult to achieve; and during the Second World War, when everything was against it — from clothing coupons and food rationing, to a ban on church bells (except in case of national invasion) and bridegrooms sent suddenly abroad

on active service — the desire to have one marvellous day to remember became iron determination. (It was no coincidence that Sir Alan Herbert's *Bless the Bride* brought such rapturous applause in 1947, or that his lyric, 'This is my lovely day, It is the day I shall remember the day I'm dying', had half his audience in tears.) One wartime bride who had set her heart on her wedding being 'the real thing', and achieved it even in 1944, later described how it was managed for *Brides* magazine. She was a schoolteacher; her bridegroom was an Army officer; and they had known each other since they were 12. Just before the Battle of Alamein, in 1942, when he was sent out to the Middle East, romance blossomed. (His father wrote to him soon afterwards: 'Is there anything between you and Margaret?' and was told: 'Yes — 5,000 miles.') They wrote to each other; they saw each other when he came home on leave; then:

Suddenly at a week's notice, Douglas came back for a course with a week's leave at the end. I came in from the shelter and there was the letter saying 'How about getting married?' It was a fantastic rush. I wanted the 'real thing' in every respect and raked in all the coupons possible. It was so nice that people didn't need to be asked for them. They offered. I bought my dress and headdress one Saturday morning scuttling up and down Oxford Street in a taxi — something I'd never have done normally. My dress was obviously pre-war; white figured satin that cost about £20 at Debenhams. The headdress was imitation orange blossom which was just about unobtainable so it cost £6. 4s. 10d., which horrified my mother, but time was so short. I had enough coupons for this but no more, so my bridesmaid wore a blue net dress that I'd worn at a friend's wedding in 1938. I'd saved a pair of treasured silk stockings. Any stockings were terribly scarce. I remember going bare-legged on our honeymoon which was in December. My veil and shoes were borrowed, and I didn't have the coupons for a new going away outfit, so I made do with a brown coat and a blue dress I'd had before. But almost everything for the wedding itself was new, right down to the satin pants. My own

nightmare was that the house would be bombed and I'd lose the lot.

The wedding was gorgeous. We had a full peal of bells, which Churchill allowed because there was no fear of invasion anymore. And the reception, thanks to the black market, was as lush as any in peacetime. Somehow we got hold of a turkey and drink, and the cake was made and given by the parents of one of my pupils. Then we had a four-day honeymoon in Hove. The weather was lovely but the beach was lined with barbed wire. After that we didn't see each other again for eleven months and we had our real honeymoon in April 1946 when Douglas was demobbed.

A more unlikely bride to long for the 'real thing in every respect' was French singer, Edith Piaf — the 'Little Sparrow' — tiny, frail, a child of the streets (born, the daughter of a Paris street acrobat and a street singer, on a policeman's cloak under a Paris street lamp in 1915); acclaimed around the world, hooked on drugs, and, on the evidence of her half-sister, sad and wounded if a man — any man — did not want to sleep with her. At the age of 37, Edith Piaf married for the first time. 'She kept repeating dizzily, "This is my first marriage, so I really must love him".' She wanted it all to be like the song *Mariage*, which Henri Contet had written for her some years before. 'A wedding is a church and pealing bells, it's a love feast,' she told her sister. But there were problems:

What worried her most was the wedding dress. She wanted to have one. 'But it would be ridiculous if I got married in white. That would be going a bit far. I can't wear a veil either, can I? You know, that was something I always wanted. I never celebrated my First Communion with the dress and the crown and all the rest of the stuff. First communicants look like little brides. I used to be so jealous of them.'

She was transformed, happy. Physically she looked ill, but she was less tense. What I didn't know was that she had found the solution — he had stopped rationing the drugs.

She wanted to be well for the wedding; afterwards . . . *on verra.*

She had also solved the problem of what to wear:

I've been thinking about it. The virgin's colours are blue and white. There's nothing purer than Our Lady; I'll get married in sky blue. I'll have a little violet tulle hat instead of the veil. It'll look white in the photos.

And so, on 29 July 1952, in the Town Hall of the sixteenth arrondissement of Paris, Edith Giovanna Gassion (stage-name Edith Piaf) married René Victor Eugène Ducos (stage-name Jacques Pills — one half of the duet act, Pills and Tabet), aged 46. But it wasn't what she had longed for. 'It didn't mean anything. They galloped through it. It wasn't a real wedding at all', she said. 'But I'm going to make up for it. We're going to go through it again in New York, in style, in a church.'

Two months later they left for America where both were to appear in cabaret — Piaf at the Versailles in New York, and Jacques Pills at La Vie en Rose — and on 20 September they were married again in the church of St. Vincent de Paul. Her French agent Louis Barrier gave the bride away, and Marlene Dietrich, having helped her to dress in her suite at the Waldorf Astoria, acted as a witness at the ceremony. Piaf wore sky blue from top to toe; the church bells rang, the organ played, and the bridegroom wore a white carnation in dark blue suit. The priest blessed the rings, and outside, friends and fans gave their blessing with a shower of rice.

Two receptions were arranged: a luncheon at New York's most *chic* and expensive restaurant, Le Pavillon, and a cocktail party given by the Versailles, where, a few hours later, Piaf was back at work. Several blocks away, Jacques Pills also sang that night — a new song which he had written for his new wife, *Formidable.*

Twenty years on, wanting bridal white so much, Edith

Piaf might well have gone right ahead and worn it, for, as Winefride Jackson wrote in the *Sunday Telegraph* (2 April 1972): 'no one seriously considers the implications of a white dress and veil for the bride. It is now a fashion and not a symbol.' A theory backed up by a wedding photograph in the *Sunday Express* five months later, showing the bride, in full-length white dress and frilly white mob-cap, hugging her new husband, a 29-year-old 'service engineer', and her former husband, an ex-painter and decorator turned boutique owner, and the three-year-old daughter of the previous marriage. Husband No. 1 had acted as best man to Husband No. 2. 'He's been just great about the whole thing', said the bride. 'We were very happy he was here', said the service engineer.

But in April 1973, when Miss Bernadette Devlin (leader of street fighters in the cause of Catholic Ireland, an 'honourable member' of the British House of Commons, and the well-publicised mother of a baby born out of wedlock) married a man who, it was equally well-publicised, was not the father of the child, the newspaper columnists asked: 'Was virginal white brocade REALLY a good idea?'

For bridesmaids this century white has not been popular — for purely aesthetic reasons. Except at royal weddings (when it has been the majority choice) or for small child attendants, a colourful contrast is more usual. In Britain all the bridesmaids are generally dressed in the same style and shade, but American brides are more enterprising. At Patricia Nixon's wedding there were four attendants all dressed in 'opalescent layered gowns of mint green and lilac with fluttery necklines and hems', but while three of them wore 'lilac underskirted with misty green', the matron-of-honour (Julie Eisenhower, the bride's sister), wore 'a similar dress of pale green organdie with an underlayer of lilac'. All had halo hats and carried small posies. The idea of having each dress in a different shade of the same colour, which was so effective at Luci

Baines Johnson's wedding, was also followed at a much earlier White House marriage: Jessie Wilson, daughter of President Woodrow Wilson, in 1913, had four bridesmaids plus her elder sister as maid-of-honour, and once again all wore pink — palest rose for the maid-of-honour, deep rose for the bride's younger sister, and something in between for the other three attendants. To modern taste the dresses themselves were hideous, with silver lamé underskirts, 'Elizabethan ruffs of silver lace' and draped pink charmeuse everywhere else. They showed four inches of ankle, which was thought to be rather daring. The headdresses were equally unbecoming: 'small rose velvet caps, trimmed with silver lace wired to stand up in the Russian fashion'. The result looked like a mad, fluted crown, higher one side than the other and was worn, inevitably, at eyebrow level. Nine years later, in England, the seven bridesmaids at the marriage of the Hon. Edwina Ashley and Lord Louis Mountbatten (later Earl Mountbatten of Burma) also wore wired silver lace, but this time made up into 'Dutch bonnets'. (It was the bride at this wedding who went Russian, wearing a triangular jewelled headdress, clamped, once more, low down on the forehead.)

At the very beginning of the century wide-brimmed hats were most popular for bridesmaids and these (usually made of lace or light-weight straw) became fashionable again in the Thirties. Garlands or sprays of imitation flowers — often incorporating corn or wheatears — have been almost continuously in favour, but recently, there has been a trend towards no headdress at all. The long, straight hairstyles which have been the general fashion for the last five years or so, are often presented just as they are, or with a very small circlet of flowers or narrow ribbon, worn either in the hair or round the forehead. The result has been eerily Mediaeval: a band of virgin(?) maidens with their hair hanging, and a bride who could just as truly be said to have 'married in her hair' as any girl in the 14th or 15th centuries.

In the 1950s I worked on a weekly newspaper in Kent and one of my many, many tasks was to write the wedding notices. Like most local papers, we sent out printed questionnaires to all brides in the area, and they filled in the details from which the reports were written. Without having to feed the answers into a computer, or even take a random survey, it was quite obvious then what was the most popular headgear for bridal attendants. Far more often than not, the question 'What did the bridesmaids wear?' received the same crisp reply: 'Dutch caps and a gold locket, present of the groom.' And that was all. (The bride often took her own white dress and veil so much for granted that all she claimed to have worn herself was: 'A pearl necklace, present of the groom.')

Pageboys always appear to be most in evidence at either end of the social scale. At royal and society weddings they usually wear kilts, sporrans and shirts with frills at the throat and cuffs. White satin court dress, very popular during the first half of the century is on the wane. Instead, miniature guardsmen often march up the aisle now — in uniforms hired for the day. (In 1973 it cost £5·50 to kit out a junior guardsman; 'an alternative fur busby' instead of a 'toy soldier hat' brought the total up to £6·75. Also on offer: 'Boy's morning suit' — scaled down model of black tail coat, striped trousers, grey waistcoat, and carnation in the buttonhole — £3·95.)

Who pays for the outfits worn by the attendants is still open to doubt. A generous father of the bride usually does the decent thing and takes care of the lot. Otherwise, accepting the honour of accompanying a friend to the altar can mean forking out for a dress designed to make the bride's younger sister look like an angel, but which does nothing at all for anyone else.

Married bridal attendants are not too common in England, where there is still a tacit assumption that after marriage a girl puts such public frolics behind her. When one is chosen, she is usually a recently married sister of the bride, or a lifelong 'best friend', whose support, at the last

great trial before a husband takes over, is considered indispensable. In either case, her relationship to the bride, as much as her married status, fits her for the title of matron-of-honour and she is automatically platoon commander. When there is no married attendant, the head girl is called, simply, the 'chief bridesmaid' in Britain; but, in America, she is given the more romantic name of 'maid-of-honour' and the whole question of rank is more complicated.

Often a bride has both a maid-of-honour and a matron-of-honour — and the maid can be senior to the matron (especially if she is the sister of the bride). Of Luci Baines Johnson's thirteen attendants, one was a 5-year-old male ring-bearer, one a 5-year-old flower girl; two of the nine 'bridesmaids' were married (the husband of one of them was a 'groomsman', while the husband of another, the bridegroom's brother, would have been best man if he had not been fighting in Vietnam). Then there was a matron-of-honour, known to the bride for only three years; and the head girl, Lynda Bird Johnson, sister of the bride and maid-of-honour.

Children of previous marriages often appear, and even divorcees get listed as nominal bridesmaids. Cecil Beaton, present at the epic Hollywood wedding of Bessie Love in 1930, described the entrance of the bridal procession with relish in his *Diaries* 1922–1939:

Excited screams could be heard from the crowd outside, heralding the arrival of the bride. The organist was having the time of his life, pulling out all stops. The air vibrated with thunderous fanfare.

One by one, at intervals of six yards, the bridesmaids moved up the aisle with jerky, funeral pace. And what bridesmaids! Divorcees and mothers alternated with famous stars, all wearing large hats and flower-trimmed crinolines. Rather naively, I still believed that most bridesmaids were virgins. But perhaps they realised they couldn't find enough; so the retinue had been culled from the bride's friends, both married women and divorcees. Norma Shearer crept

towards the altar, looking chiselled from alabaster. Her unseeing eyes stared out of a flawlessly complexioned face. Bebe Daniels, once a Mack Sennett bathing beauty and now a big star, walked behind Blanche Sweet, the maid of honour.

Here comes the rock-pippet bride! Bessie Love entered on the arm of her very proud over-dressed father. She wore a shroud of white tulle and looked like a terrified bird. Bessie radiated love.

Beaton himself was wearing his evening tails, for the first time since arriving in Hollywood, and had a gardenia in his buttonhole. While the guests arrived, a woman 'in surplice and cap sang semi-religious love songs'. After the 'short and sweet' ceremony, performed by 'an affected minister', bride and bridegroom marched together down the aisle, between gilded baskets of pink gladioli tied with pink tulle, and disappeared into the hysterical crowd of fans and autograph-hunters outside. At the reception, at the Ambassador Hotel, Lilyan Tashman, 'with an escort of eight or nine vaguely *louche* young men, looked ever so ladylike in a chinchilla cape. Her scrambled-egg curls were done in a Greek fashion.' Mae Murray, 'with painted pout and daffodil-yellow hair, was a miracle of agelessness in spite of being a grandmother. She looked a fat dimpled cherub in a Kate Greenaway dress of silver lace. She chirped away to her sweating, long-haired husband, Prince Mdivani.' Hedda Hopper was there; Cecil B. DeMille and family; William Powell, Ronald Colman, Laura LaPlante, Anita Loos, who escorted Beaton, and many, many more.

Mr. Beaton doesn't say what the bridegroom wore and until recently it has been the least interesting aspect of the whole commotion (we didn't even have a slot for it in the wedding forms I used to send out); but in Britain, at any rate, it is the one thing which can cause more pre-marital uproar than almost anything else. In England, much of Europe, America, and what used to be called the colonies,

brides of all social rank wear white or reject it according to their own personal taste; but until a few years ago, the bridegroom's clothes had deeper significance: they were taken as a measure of the class he was born into, had succeeded to, or was aiming at, and to some extent that remains true. If a man who is still only aiming decides to wear a morning suit, he can walk a stormy path to the altar, with every other male involved in the affair challenging aggressively: 'Just let anyone try to dress *me* up in a monkey suit, that's all!' At the top of the scale, the situation used to be exactly reversed: for the first half of the century, a bridegroom who did not wear a morning suit (or a uniform) met with icy politeness, condescending civility, or searching questions as to his antecedents.

But now, as one lively 83-year-old recently told me: 'Weddings have changed! Not among the lower-middle class and middle class but among certain groups of the so-called aristocracy. When Lord Bath's son was married some two years ago, all the important males were in fancy dress — every colour of trouser and waistcoat, very lavishly embroidered, and hair hanging to the shoulders! In such cases, the bride takes almost second place!'

This trend towards male glory has filtered down to some middle-class weddings, too, where the latest 'formal' fashion for the bridegroom is a dark green velvet lounge suit (though 'lounge' is a very inadequate description) worn with a wide and colourful tie. To off-set the turbulence at the top, Moss Bros. (branches everywhere, including two in Paris) say 'there is a tendency for morning coat suits to be worn slightly down the social ladder these days' — which has kept business steady. But they are obviously keeping a wary eye on the situation, and are 'encouraging' the search for 'variations from formal morning wear'. (In 1973, they launched a competition for fashion students, to produce a modern alternative.) In the meantime their catalogue, under a line of identical penguins, says:

Morning Wear is not a uniform. Although it is the custom

for Bridesmaids to be dressed alike, it is incorrect for the men at a wedding to be dressed identically. For example, they should not all wear grey morning suits.

The morning coat can be black or grey, the waistcoat black, grey, or almost any other colour, and the trousers striped, dark or light, or shepherd's plaid.

Morning dress is capable of almost as much variation as a lounge suit, and each man should express his individual personality.

In a mass swing towards expressing their individual personality, many men now choose the all grey morning suit (matching coat, trousers and waistcoat — usually in 'bird's eye' cloth), and find that instead of being the one glorious exception at the wedding, the fellows who kept to the more traditional black coats and striped trousers are the ones that catch the eye.

At 'fashionable London or country weddings', many, if not most of the male guests still wear morning dress (even when the bridegroom does not), 'But lower down the social scale only the bridegroom, best man, ushers, and the two fathers dress up and most of the remainder of the male guests wear lounge suits. There is a tendency, of course, that if a man is invited as a guest to a wedding and he has a morning suit in his wardrobe he will wear it.' (And there must be many such men in England, since this one firm has been *selling* 'between 2,000 and 3,000 morning suits for very many years', as well as hiring out 'many thousands', more.)

In Wales, it has been discovered that 'many wedding attenders prefer black short jackets rather than morning coats', while in Scotland it is difficult to get men to wear top hats. (Could this be thrift? After all it is an extra 80p for the usual grey one, and £1·25 for black. And even if you do get 'Braces and Studs supplied at no extra charge', a pound's a pound for a' that.) The Isle of Thanet — 'Canterbury, Margate, etc.' — has a bad sartorial record with Moss Bros. 'Far too many men get married in lounge suits there', they say.

In America formal morning wear looks much the same as in England, but an American description of it strikes oddly on the English ear. The *New York Times* News Service put it like this after Patricia Nixon's 1971 marriage: 'All the men in the wedding party, including Nixon, wore grey, swallow-tail cutaways with striped trousers, Ascots, stiff wing collars and gloves.' Ascots (grey silk cravats) and wing collars have made an occasional reappearance in Britain recently, just as, occasionally, an American bridegroom wears a tie (and is then said to have dressed 'in the English style'). The social pressure to wear a 'swallow-tail cutaway' can obviously be great: the late President Lyndon Johnson wore one for his daughter Luci's wedding, though he refused to do so for his inauguration as President three years earlier.

In Australia, for grand evening weddings, the bridegroom wears evening tails, as did the demon interviewer of British television, Robin Day, when, at the age of 41, he swapped his spotted bow tie for a white one and married a ravishing 24-year-old Australian barrister, at St. Mary's Anglican Cathedral, Perth, in 1965. (She wore an elegant white turban with a veil attached to the back. He said the whole deal had been 'more nerve-racking than any TV show'.)

Except for the caftan and Mongolian-shepherd's-jerkin fringe, a lounge suit is the only alternative to morning dress in Britain; but in America dinner jackets are often worn, and in the summer the wedding pages of many a newspaper look suitably tropical, with all the bridegrooms pictured wearing white tuxedos.

For the first few years of the century, frock coats were worn for daytime weddings on both sides of the Atlantic, the many older guests continued to wear them into the Twenties. There is a splendid, laughing wedding photograph of King George V and two of his sons, taken at the marriage of the King's niece, Princess Maud of Fife, in 1923: the King wearing a rather old-fashioned, but magnificent, frock coat (satin-faced collar and velvet

ribbon trimming), while the 28-year-old Duke of York, and his brother, 21-year-old Prince George (later Duke of Kent) wear equally gorgeous silk-bound morning coats, pearl-grey ties and spats.

The King and Prince George both sported white carnations in their buttonholes at this wedding, and for most of the 20th century this flower has been the modern version of the wedding favour. Only a limited distribution, to the main wedding party, is now expected; though many other guests supply their own. As with the clothes which provide the buttonhole, how a man wears his carnation is yet another indication of class. Top men take them neat; lesser men add a backing of asparagus fern and a twist of silver foil round the stems for containment and preservation purposes. In the unfortunate circumstance of a suit not having a workable buttonhole in the lapel, the *boutonnière* is pinned in place — with a gleaming expanse of silver on show.

Two carnations, one below the other, and a little asparagus fern, is the feminine version, but once again, not for top ladies. They might wear an orchid perhaps, or a rose, but not two white carnations.

The custom of giving flower and ribbon favours to all the guests died suddenly at the end of the 19th century, and was only briefly revived at the beginning of the 20th. The *Illustrated London News* (16 January 1904), described one instance of the revival in an account of Viscount Fincastle's wedding, but first of all it set the scene with details of the multi-coloured costumes worn by the bride's attendants:

> The bridesmaids' dresses were extremely pretty: they were of white gauze over white silk, made with deep collars and edged with brown fur, and having wide folded sashes with long ends of turquoise-blue satin, against which the shower bouquets of pink roses showed up well; then their hats were of pale-green crumpled felt, trimmed with plumes shaded from blue to green, and with folds of blue chiffon. These six attendant maidens had committed to them the

pretty task of distributing 'favours' to the guests in the church while the register was being signed — a white rose-bud mingled with sprays of white heather and lilies-of-the-valley, tied with a tiny piece of ribbon. This is a pretty old custom, and one that Fashion is smiling upon again; it fills up the tedious quarter of an hour while the couple and their nearest friends are in the Vestry, and gives the whole bridal party a feeling of community in the celebration.

The rose was not only the 'Queen of Flowers' and symbolic of love, and thus 'very suitable at a wedding', but according to this writer, signified different aspects of love at different stages in its development:

The half-opened bud is a symbol of the beginning of affection: the maiden who accepts it with a smile is understood to be expressing her willingness to be courted. The full-blown rose speaks of the perfumed sweetness and the unequalled beauty of a happy passion.

Myrtle, on the other hand, was 'emblematical of the evergreen nature that ought to distinguish wedded love: and white heather is the established symbol of "good luck".'

Now, even white carnations for men are going through troubled times. At many society weddings less than half the principal men wear flowers of any kind, and at one of the last grand royal weddings — that of Princess Alexandra of Kent in 1963 — red carnations, not white, were worn. One 1973 bridegroom who struck an even greater blow for originality was John Grimond, journalist son of the former leader of the British Liberal Party, Mr. Jo Grimond. For his May wedding to the daughter of actress Celia Johnson, he wore a velvet suit with a large daisy in the buttonhole.

Able Seamen in the British Navy have a charming custom all their own: 'When they marry in Square Rig, instead of tying their bag with blue tapes, they tie it with white satin ribbon'. Which, in non-nautical terms, means when they marry in bell-bottoms and jerkin, they tie the

scarf which goes under the sailor collar with festive white ribbons and end up with a satin bow and streamers on their bosoms. On the day of the wedding a wreath with fluttering white ribbons is hoisted at the main masthead of the ship in which they serve. Officers, who also marry in their uniforms, are not allowed bridal ribbons (or carnations), but they have the privilege of a guard of honour of fellow officers, who present a crossed swords archway for bride and bridegroom to walk through as they leave the church porch.

In America, the marital tradition of 'his' and 'hers' is kept alive by the bridegroom wearing a buttonhole of the same flowers used for the bride's bouquet — and it looks very attractive indeed. President Franklin D. Roosevelt's youngest son, John, wore a fairly large arrangement of one white orchid backed by lilies-of-the-valley for his wedding in 1938; and the bride, Boston socialite Anne Lindsay Clark, carried a large, round bouquet of the same flowers. She also wore 'real imported orange blossoms' in her hair, while, the bridegroom was in 'English' morning dress — soft collar and tie and slightly lighter striped trousers than are usual in America. (He also wore grey spats, and carried gloves and a black top hat, instead of the grey more favoured in Britain.)

At Luci Baines Johnson's 1966 wedding, the bridegroom wore a small spray of lilies-of-the-valley, to match his bride's small posy.

Bridal bouquets have steadily diminished in size during this century. The 'shower' arrangement, which came into fashion during the 1890s, had a good run, but in the late 1920s it was replaced by a double-ended style, which was cradled like a baby in the crook of the arm, rather than carried. The bridesmaids at this time often had 'a sheaf' of flowers — sometimes delphiniums, since delphinium blue was a popular colour for bridesmaids' dresses. In the Forties and Fifties, large, round jobs were much favoured — or, as a more demure alternative, a white Prayer Book with floral bookmark and trailing satin

ribbon. During the Sixties the posy made a come-back, large to begin with, then gradually dwindling until it reached the neat dimensions of most arrangements today. The choice of flowers has also changed: stephanotis, for many years virtually indispensable, has gone into retreat, while lilies-of-the-valley are sprouting everywhere. The most recent development of all is the coloured bouquet. These haven't appeared at society marriages yet, but a random sampling of the wedding pages of the Kent newspaper, the *Bromley Times*, for April 1973, produced descriptions like this:

The bride, who was given away by her father, wore a full-length lace-trimmed dress of lawn. Her short two-tier veil was secured by a single white rose, and she carried yellow freesias and white pipped hyacinths decorated with turquoise ribbon.

The bride . . . carried a bouquet of pink, red and white roses.

The bride . . . wore a white dress trimmed with blue, and carried a bouquet of white roses, blue carnations and lilies-of-the-valley.

Given away by her uncle . . . the bride wore a traditional white embossed organza gown trimmed with velvet, a matching cap and a three-layer veil also trimmed with velvet. She carried a basket of mixed spring flowers.

The bride, who was given away by her father, wore a classic-style dress of white crepe Courtelle with flower motif trimmings and train. Her short veil was secured by a Juliet cap, and she carried a shower of freesias, hyacinth bells and cheerfulness.

. . . she carried a Victorian posy of mauve and white spring flowers.

'Cheerfulness' and 'pipped hyacinths' (or 'hyacinth pips' as they are also called) are new to the wedding scene since I dealt with such things in the Fifties. And 'mixed spring flowers' were then reserved for the bridesmaids.

The throwing of the bride's bouquet — the girl to catch it will be the next to marry — is talked about a great deal

in Britain, but is performed more often in America. At Jessie Woodrow Wilson's 1913 wedding, superstition was cruelly tested: the lucky wedding ring in the cake was found by the bride's elder sister, Margaret, while the tossed bouquet went to her younger sister, Eleanor. The bouquet proved to have the stronger magic, and sister Eleanor became another White House bride within six months.

In Britain, 'Brides who throw their wedding bouquets are traditional; those who preserve them, sentimental', said the *Daily Telegraph* in April 1972; and went on to suggest a means of throwing the bouquet and saving it, too: 'You need only keep back a representative bloom or two . . . to have an everlasting memento. From these Mrs. Philippa Atkinson, in Sussex, can fashion a dried and pressed picture arrangement either on a suitable fabric background or a piece of the wedding dress or veil. Glazed and framed in narrow white, inside size 8in. × 7in., it costs £6.50, including the container she provides for you to post the flowers and foliage to her.'

Floral decorations in the church and for the reception in Britain nowadays tend to be like many of the brides they are prepared for — nice, but dull. Even at royal weddings all the effort goes into two huge and beautiful arrangements flanking the altar — after that, inspiration dies. This is not the case in America. There, it is not only the lavishness which impresses (though it can hardly fail to do so), but also the brilliant attention to detail: even the cassocks on which the bride and principal guests kneel are given a bridal bost. At Alice Lee Roosevelt's 1906 wedding, 'the *prie-dieu* was upholstered in nuptial white fabric, tied with white satin ribbons and filled with the petals of Bride's roses and lilies'. At Luci Baines Johnson's wedding, 'miniature markers' of ivy, roses, babies breath, arum lilies and white delphiniums, decorated the 'kneelers' set in the chancel of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception for the chief wedding party, while

larger versions of the same thing decorated the end of every fourth pew. The Shrine was turned into a young forest, with small locust and ficus trees, laced with lilies-of-the-valley, white roses and babies breath, and even the 'ropes' cordoning off the pews not in use for the ceremony were made of green smilax.

For Ethel du Pont's 1937 marriage (which took place in the tiny church at Christiana Hundred, Delaware, founded by Colonel Henry du Pont in 1859), 2,000 sprays of jasmine were shipped across the continent from California, to scent the chapel and, with peonies and lilies, decorate the end of every other pew.

I have never heard of this delightful custom being followed in Britain, but a friend, in March 1973, seeing 'the wedding awning up' outside Vere Street Church, just off London's Oxford Street, strolled inside and found the end of every pew decorated with a rosette and streamers of white satin ribbon, which she thought 'looked charming'.

A recent Hollywood wedding, which revived all the excesses of the good old days of the film capital, was said to have taken place amidst £25,000-worth of blooms: two-hundred dozen white lilacs and ninety-two dozen white tulips, flown in from Paris, fraternised with 'thousands of Californian varieties'. The bridegroom was 55-year-old singer, Dean Martin, father of seven, who had 'already been to his own wedding twice before'; the bride, 25-year-old Cathy Mae Hawn, had only made one previous excursion. Not to be outdone by the jungle of flowers around her, Miss Hawn wore a complete hair-do of lilies-of-the-valley, carried an outsize bouquet of the same flowers, and had the champagne glasses festooned with white satin ribbons and sprays of more lily-of-the-valley.

Doves were released at intervals; pews were borrowed from Warner Brothers and 20th Century Fox; Frank Sinatra was best man, and thought it 'a lovely but simple wedding'. 'Truly an old-fashioned Hollywood marriage',

said the man in charge of the flower show — which was probably nearer the mark.

And so, from the not quite ridiculous, to the nearly sublime — royal weddings. These have altered considerably over the last seventy years and the most noticeable change of all — the fact that Westminster Abbey is now the 'traditional' place for them — came about, once again, by chance. Just as Queen Victoria's short wedding journey from the new royal residence (Buckingham Palace) to the old one (St. James's Palace) snow-balled into the public cavalcade we now expect on these occasions, so the 'unsafe condition' of St. George's Chapel, Windsor, in 1919, led to all the Abbey splendour of the present century.

In 1904, when Edward VII had been King for three years, and his niece, Princess Alice of Albany (now the Countess of Athlone) was about to marry, he decided that the weddings of the numerous descendants of Queen Victoria should be carried as quietly as possible. As the *Illustrated London News* explained:

> The King has ordered that, as far as possible, the marriage of these junior members of the royal family shall be regarded as a domestic and not a public affair, as this event will set a precedent in some respects for others of a similar kind that may be expected in time to come. It has been decided to invite to the ceremony only personal friends and personages of State importance who are always asked to such events, and there will be no alterations in the chapel [*St. George's, Windsor*] to allow more than its usual complement of seats being provided.

This ruling was followed and Princess Alice's wedding was reasonably restrained. The guest list was pared down and she had only five bridesmaids, who wore blue, rather than the white of major royal marriages. The Princess of Wales (formerly Princess May of Teck), whose brother was the bridegroom, thought it 'a most cheerful wedding', with 'no crying' and the mother of the bride, the widowed Duchess of Albany, 'behaved like a brick'.

The pattern worked well until the end of the First World War, and the marriage of Princess Alice's cousin, Princess Patricia of Connaught, another grandchild of Queen Victoria. When her wedding was planned, for February 1919, St. George's Chapel was found to be 'structually unsound', and the Dean of Windsor launched an appeal to pay for repairs. The obvious alternative was the Chapel Royal, St. James's, which had been used for the marriages of Queen Victoria, the Princess Royal, and Princess May of Teck (who, after another name change, was now Queen Mary). But this was, as Queen Victoria had said, 'small & *very* ugly', and Princess Patricia was one of those lesser members of the royal family whose popularity was out of all proportion to their position; she was called 'our adored Princess Pat', and received rapturous applause wherever she went: a chapel holding only 200 guests was no place for her wedding — or for the first major royal event since the beginning of the war. And so Westminster Abbey was thought of; it had been the scene of many society weddings in the previous century, and with a minimum capacity of 2,500 was certainly the right size.

The newspapers were delighted. It would be, they calculated, the first royal wedding in the Abbey for over 500 years, since King Richard II married Anne of Bohemia in 1382. This piece of research was polished up afresh for the next two royal weddings: when Princess Mary, only daughter of George V and Queen Mary, married three years later, she was the 'first child of a sovereign' to have been married in the Abbey for more than 500 years, and the following year her brother, the future King George VI, was 'the first royal prince' to have been married in the Abbey for more than 500 years.

The newspapers and the nation had something else to ponder with these three marriages — both royal brides and the royal bridegroom had chosen non-royal spouses. And Princess Patricia, on marrying Commander Alexander Robert Maule Ramsay, D.S.O., R.N., third son of the

Earl of Dalhousie, chose to relinquish her royal title, too.

Looking back on Princess Patricia's wedding (at the time of Princess Mary's), *The Times* recalled:

> The wedding of the adored 'Princess Pat' to Commander (now Captain) Ramsay in Westminster Abbey is still fresh in the public mind. An Armistice time wedding: a khaki and blue, a naval and military wedding. The beauty of the bride in her Venetian-looking white gown with silver embroidery and lace; the little pages, the eight bridesmaids in their dresses of 'love-in-the-mist' blue and picture hats, the white flowers and gold plate — there was something very gracious about it all within the soaring wistful beauty of the Abbey and the King and Queen were there and the Prince of Wales, and many others of the Royal Family. The Duke of Connaught gave his daughter away and she, who had come to the altar Princess Patricia of Connaught left it Lady Patricia Ramsay.
>
> Thus among many other ways does the Royal Family of Great Britain build itself firmly into the hearts and interests of Great Britain and of Britons overseas.

At the time, the paper had thought: 'her renunciation of her royal style and title, to become Lady Patricia Ramsay, was felt to be a sign of the new spirit of national union which the war and its perils, in which the bridegroom played such a gallant part, have created among the people'.

The war and its perils, had also made Britain relentlessly anti-German, and toppled many a European throne. The source of acceptable royal partners for British princes and princesses was drying up; an all-royal match was now to become the exception rather than the rule. Although Queen Victoria had encouraged the idea of members of the royal family marrying into the British aristocracy, only one of her nine children did so: Princess Louise, her fourth daughter, who married the Marquis of Lorne, son and heir of the Duke of Argyll. Of King Edward VII's children, two made royal marriages, one

married into the aristocracy, and two died unmarried. With the children of King George V, however, the balance altered radically: only one of the five made a royal marriage (the Duke of Kent to Princess Marina of Greece); three married into the aristocracy; and the heir to the throne chose to give up his crown for a twice-divorced American.

There were more shocks to come in the next generation — though not of the same high voltage. At the beginning of the 1960s, the country was still getting used to the idea of a distant connection of the throne (Lady Pamela Mountbatten) marrying an interior decorator, when the Queen's sister announced she was to wed a photographer. As a Reuter's correspondent pointed out, it was the first time for 457 years that the daughter of a British king had married a plain 'Mr.' 'The last to do so was Princess Cecilie, daughter of Edward IV, who married an obscure "mister" named Thomas Kymbe, in a ceremony that passed almost unnoticed in its day.'

What was to be done about the plain 'Mr.'? And would — almost unthinkable — the Princess become a plain 'Mrs.'? The *Illustrated London News* called on the editor of *Burke's Peerage* to sort out this 'knotty problem' for which there was 'no precise precedent'. He had to admit he couldn't, but in doing so mentioned that the photographer, Mr. Antony Armstrong-Jones, came from the landed gentry, 'the untitled aristocracy as Sir Bernard Burke liked to call them'. It had a comforting ring to it. Mr. Armstrong-Jones, was also found to have been educated at Eton, which was equally reassuring; and later to have coxed the Cambridge boat against Oxford, which was the right sort of thing to have done. His parents were, unfortunately, divorced, but his mother had married the Earl of Rosse and his half-brother was called Lord Oxmantown, which made that part of it all right. The chief trouble remained: Mr. Armstrong-Jones was too well-known in Fleet Street as a working photographer, and familiarity breeds — familiarity. While one half of the

press was busy building him up; the other half was determined to keep him right down there at Street level like the friends he had left behind him.

In the end, the Princess stayed a princess and carried on with her public duties, while, the year following the marriage, the 'Mr.' was made an Earl (the Earl of Snowdon) and became a better photographer than ever.

And now, thirteen years later, Princess Margaret's niece, the only daughter of the Monarch, is to marry another 'member of the people', 'the commoner of her choice', the son of 'a company director' (after which some newspapers, in the interests of the whole truth, added, 'of the Walls sausage firm'). After months of excited speculation, stern and sometimes salty denials, countless fuzzy photographs of the 'just good friends' exercising their horses, the announcement was made on 29 May 1973 from Balmoral, where a loving family gathering had been staged: Princess Anne's elder brother flew in from his Royal Navy duties in the Caribbean; her two younger brothers were on half-term holiday from school; the bridegroom-to-be was on leave from his regiment, the Queen's Dragoon Guards, stationed in Germany. Next day all travelled in the royal train to London, where the Princess showed off her sapphire and diamond ring to the press; Lieutenant Mark Phillips told how 'petrified' he had been, asking her father for her hand (the Duke of Edinburgh had the final domestic say, while the Queen took care of State approval); and Her Majesty gave a celebration lunch for the handsome Lieutenant's parents.

The press, this time, gave their unanimous blessing. It was a 'fairy-tale love story'; 'A most suitable choice'; 'They have many interests in common'; 'the Princess and her fiancé met through their common interest in horses'; and, from the *Daily Mirror*, 'horses all over Britain must be neighing with delight'. Love had conquered all 'at a canter', and the Princess had galloped 'blushing down the straight', 'rushing the last fence', just when everyone

thought the romance had cooled. Within hours of the announcement fashion editors had decided what the Princess should wear on her wedding day and one paper even pasted a picture of Her Royal Highness's face over that of a model in a modern wedding dress to show how right they were. The general feeling was one of relief. As with Albert Edward, Prince of Wales — Queen Victoria's problem heir 'Bertie' — more than a hundred years before, an early marriage to a strong-minded partner was thought to be the wisest course. The *Daily Mirror*'s caption 'Anne meets her match' was meant to be read two ways.

The *Daily Express* felt obliged to point out that 'Mark's great-great-grandfather was a Lancashire coal miner, while Anne's was Edward VII', but all agreed with the *Daily Mirror* that he was 'upper-crust enough'. (The editor of *Debrett* later spoilt this big-heartedness by discovering that Lieutenant Phillips was descended from Edward I, king from 1272 to 1307, and that the couple were in fact 'thirteenth cousins, twice removed'. But then someone discovered that Mrs. Simpson was a descendant of William the Conqueror.) The general feeling was that Princess Anne's was a 'love match', there had been no 'royal match-making'. The mettlesome 22-year-old daughter of the Queen and her 24-year-old Lieutenant were in love, the Welsh Guards played *Congratulations* at the changing of the guard, and the country loved the lovers.

'A love match.' It is what the newspapers have said of almost every royal engagement this century; and it is what the royal family themselves have felt, too. In November 1921 the 39-year-old Henry, Viscount Lascelles, eldest son of the Earl of Harewood, proposed to the 24-year-old Princess Mary (later to be made Princess Royal) at Sandringham, and Queen Mary, mother of the bride-to-be, wrote in her diary: '— At 6.30 Mary came to my room to announce to me her engagement to Lord Lascelles! We then told G. & then gave Harry L. our blessing – We had to keep it quiet owing to G. having to pass

an order in council to give his consent. Of course everybody guessed what had happened & we were very cheerful & almost uproarious at dinner — We are delighted.'

Between then and the wedding in February 1922, there was many an 'hilarious' family tea-party, and great excitement, even among the Princess's brothers. '. . . as far as I can make out the 28th is going to be a day of national rejoicing in every conceivable & unconceivable manner . . . In fact it is now no longer Mary's wedding but (this from the papers) it is the "Abbey Wedding" or the "Royal Wedding" or the "National Wedding" or even the "people's" Wedding" (I have heard it called) "of our beloved Princess",' wrote the Duke of York to the Prince of Wales who was away touring India.

A few days after the ceremony, the Queen took up the story for her eldest son:

. . . a beautiful pageant from start to finish, a fine service in the Abbey, Mary doing her part to perfection (a very great ordeal before so many people) & everyone happy & pleased . . . Grannie [*Queen Alexandra*] was wonderful & looked very nice in violet velvet wearing the Garter & many fine jewels. Enormous crowds everywhere & a great reception when we stepped on to the Balcony. — We gave a large family luncheon (both families) in the state dining-room and Mary & Harry L. drove off at 3.45 — Papa & all of us throwing rice & little paper horse shoes & rose leaves after them. Papa & I felt miserable at parting, poor Papa broke down, but I mercifully managed to keep up as I so much feared Mary wld break down. However she was very brave & smiled away as they drove off in triumph to the station.

The bridegroom had worn the full dress uniform of the Grenadier Guards with the Order of the Garter conferred on him two days earlier by the King. Neither he nor Princess Pat's husband wore festive white satin bows attached to their epaulettes and this charming bridal fashion was never to reappear. Being non-royal, Lord Lascelles and Commander Ramsay were restricted to one supporter each, a 'best man', in accordance with the custom which

emerged at the end of the previous century. Only the sons of the King were allowed two, in all cases their brothers.

The bridesmaids were the traditional eight; all maiden daughters of dukes, marquises and earls, with the exception of one Princess (Princess Maud of Fife, who, with her cousin, the present bride, Princess Mary, had also been attendant on Princess Patricia of Connaught). Although the mixture was much the same as in Victorian times, the emphasis was now on relationship and friendship, rather than rank, and this was to become stronger with the years.

At the turn of the century, when Princess Alice of Albany married, the *Illustrated London News* said that her 'wedding dress was cut, as those of royal brides always are, quite low at the neck'. It was a fashion which had gone out of favour for ordinary brides in the 1870s, and now both Princess Patricia and Princess Mary conformed to more general custom with demure necklines and long sleeves. Both wore silver and white. Queen Mary, who had worn 'aluminium grey silken crêpe' at Princess Patricia's wedding, chose for her daughter's 'a beautiful gold lamé into which a bold design of cream velvet brocade had been woven, creating a rich old-gold effect'. The *Illustrated London News* made a point of confirming that 'All the main dresses were British made and British designed.'

Less than a year after Princess Mary's wedding, her brother, the Duke of York, became engaged to one of her bridesmaids, Lady Elizabeth Bowes-Lyon, ninth child of the 14th Earl of Strathmore. Again, it was a 'love match', the Duke had been wooing her for more than a year and the King had told him: 'You'll be a lucky fellow if she accepts you.' They had first met in 1905, at a children's party, when she is said, prophetically, to have given him the crystallized cherries off her sugar cake. They did not meet again until 1920, at a small private dance given by Lord Farquhar, when the Duke was 24 and Lady Elizabeth 20. This time she was not so encouraging. Lady

Elizabeth Bowes-Lyon was enjoying being launched into society, a 'coming out' which had been delayed by the war. She was quickly voted the best dancer in any London ballroom, and the prettiest and most charming girl anywhere, and, in the words of John Wheeler-Bennett (King George VI's official biographer) 'entertained a very natural reluctance to abandon the unfettered liberty of a great noble family for the restricted freedom of membership of the Royal circle, where every action was public property, every step must be watched, every word guarded'.

But, on 16 January 1923, the Duke was able to write to his parents: 'I know I am very lucky to have won her over at last,' King George V and Queen Mary were once more delighted. '. . . he looks beaming', wrote the King in his diary. The newspapers busied themselves with statistics again and discovered that both the Duke and his *fiancée* were descended from Robert the Bruce of Scotland.

Royal engagements now lasted a set three months, and the wedding was arranged for 26 April. Once more there were eight bridesmaids, two of them small nieces of the bride, two of them nieces of Queen Mary, one a fellow bridesmaid from Princess Mary's wedding. Though all were well-connected, only five were the daughters of peers. (Princess Maud of Fife didn't push her luck by appearing for a third time and it paid off: she was married in the autumn.) The year before, Princess Mary's attendants had worn veils but *The Times* announced that Lady Elizabeth's would not do so, 'as it is understood that the Duke of York does not care for them'. Instead they had the same kind of headdress as the bride (who did wear a veil, and a monstrously unbecoming one): 'A narrow fillet of myrtle green leaves with a white rose shaded pink on either side and sprigs of heather.' The result was unfortunately like earphones.

The day began grey and showery, but as the King recorded later: 'It stopped raining at about 9.30 & the sun actually came out as the Bride entered the Abbey.' On her

way up the aisle on her father's arm, Lady Elizabeth paused to place her bouquet on the tomb of the Unknown Warrior. It was, as a writer was to say on the 50th anniversary of her wedding day, 'the first of countless thousands of gestures she has made in the half-century since demonstrating her unique ability to touch the human heart'. And wherever she has gone, through fifty years of service to her country, the sun has always seemed to shine.

The brand-new British Broadcasting Company (forerunner of the British Broadcasting Corporation) asked permission to relay the ceremony over the latest miracle invention, the wireless. The go-ahead Dean of Westminister Abbey was in favour, but the Chapter said No, and it was not until eleven years later that the first royal wedding was listened to by families throughout the land. Thirteen years after that, the marriage of Princess Elizabeth, daughter of the Duke of York and Lady Elizabeth Bowes-Lyon, received even more miraculous attention: '200,000,000 future subjects heard the tremulous "I will" as radio and television services relayed the majestic Abbey ceremony'. After another thirteen-year leap, Princess Margaret's wedding was not just televised, it was 'Eurovised', and in 1963 pictures of the marriage of Princess Alexandra of Kent were 'bounced by satellite' all around the world.

In the 1930s there were three royal weddings in quick succession: one a traditional Abbey spectacular; one a more subdued affair in Buckingham Palace Chapel; the third, notorious.

The first of the trio was that of King George V and Queen Mary's youngest son, Prince George, made Duke of Kent shortly before his wedding day. And it was splendidly romantic. The girl that he married was the only royal bride from over the sea of the century: the elegant and beautiful Princess Marina. She was the daughter of Prince Nicholas of Greece (uncle of the exiled King

George II) and the Grand Duchess Hélène of Russia. And her great-grandfather was King Christian IX of Denmark, father of Britain's Queen Alexandra, consort of King Edward VII. The Duke, having left the navy because of ill-health, was at this time the 'first royal Civil Servant, attached to the Home Office as a factory inspector'. (A job he took very seriously, said a friend in the pre-marriage burst of publicity: 'He insisted, for instance, that no notification of his visits to factories should be made beforehand.')

Prince George and Princess Marina became engaged in the August of 1934 while staying with her sister and brother-in-law, Prince and Princess Paul of Yugoslavia, at their rustic summer home amidst the woods and above a lake in the mountains of Slovenia: 'The most romantic setting one could possibly have', said the bride-to-be. They were serenaded by peasants and presented with wild flowers — a garland for the head of the Princess, bouquets for both. They had known each other for five years.

Back in London, the 31-year-old Prince George made immediately for Cartier's to buy the ring: 'A large square-cut Kashmiri sapphire, flanked by two baton diamonds, set in platinum.' (Most royal engagement rings this century have had a sapphire, 'symbol of enduring love', and diamonds. Only the shape and metal have differed.) The 27-year-old Princess returned to Paris, where she had lived with her parents for twelve years, and began ordering her *trousseau.* In mid-September she boarded a cross-Channel steamer to make her first visit to England as 'Prince George's Bride-elect', At Folkestone there was no official ceremony, 'but the crowd gathered to greet her witnessed a charming incident. Standing on the quay as the boat came alongside was a little grey-haired old lady carrying flowers, and Princess Marina, recognising her former nurse, ran to kiss her directly she landed. Cheers followed the Princess as she moved towards the boat train. As she entered the special carriage, the ropes gave way

before the pressure of spectators, and they thronged the door with cries of 'Good luck, Princess!" and "Welcome to England!" '

Prince George, in morning coat and striped trousers, was on Victoria Station to greet his *fiancée* and his future in-laws, and that night escorted them to Scotland by royal train to stay with the King and Queen. At 7 a.m. next morning the Duke and Duchess of York, with their small daughter Princess Elizabeth, and the King's Guard of Honour of the 1st Battalion of the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders, were at Ballater to welcome them, and when Prince George stepped from the train he was found to have cast off his formal morning dress for kilt and sporran. At Balmoral, His Majesty the King stood on the steps of the castle in Prince of Wales check jacket, Prince of Wales check plus-fours, and Prince of Wales check socks. The ladies of the party could not compete.

In mid-October tragedy cast an ominous cloud over the great royal romance — King Alexander I of Yugoslavia was assassinated by a Croat nationalist at Marseilles on his way to Paris for a political conference. Prince Paul (Princess Marina's brother-in-law and provider of the romantic engagement setting) became Chief Regent for the 11-year-old successor to the Yugoslavian throne, and Prince George and Princess Marina, who all along had had to share the news pages with pictures of Hitler stirring the German nation to frenzy, were now over-shadowed by photographs of blood and bullets and relatives in deepest weeds.

But nothing was allowed to dim the second triumphant arrival of Princess Marina into Britain on 21 November, eight days before the wedding. This time she sailed into Dover, and there was a formal ceremony of greeting, with the Mayor 'expressing the town's welcome' and the Lady Mayoress presenting a bouquet of roses. The King and Queen, the Prince of Wales, the Duke and Duchess of York, Princess Mary and the now Earl of Harewood, were at Victoria Station in family force to meet the

boat-train, and all returned to Buckingham Palace, through cheering crowds, in a motor-car cavalcade.

In the intervening week before the marriage the British press kept up a fevered commentary. There was talk of the Greek Orthodox wedding to be held in the Chapel Royal sometime after the Abbey ceremony, to conform with the bride's religion, but everyone was disposed to be interested rather than outraged by this side-step from pure Anglicanism. The bride was discovered to be 'a portrait-painter of decided talent ... Exquisitely beautiful, healthy in mind and body ... not only witty and beautiful ... but a cultured lady'. There were pictures of her as a shock-haired baby playing with bricks — 'The builders' — and with dolls, 'The little mother'. The Prince was shown 'in cambric frock days' — complete with petticoats and sash; in 'Eton-collar days'; playing piano with the ship's jazz band as a 'Lieutenant R.N.' in the *Téméraire*; and with many a 'doggy friend'. ('In his canine friendships, it would seem, the Duke favours the larger breeds.')

Princess Marina's 'trained artist's eye' was put to wondrous use in the preparation of the *trousseau*, much of which was to be 'in her own Marina green' — a colour half Britain now wanted to wear. Captain Molyneux, an Irishman of Huguenot descent, was the *couturier* involved and he could not have been more enthusiastic: 'she has taken a more constructive and imaginative interest in her clothes than almost anyone I have ever worked for'. He incorporated many of her own designs into the 'three morning, ensembles, five afternoon dresses, six evening gowns and two coats' and the result included a black velvet evening dress with 'a most intriguing belt and gloves of natural pigskin' and another black dress, a slinky number of cloqué satin, 'the skirt slit to reveal a stripe of silver lamé. The sash is of lamé lined with petunia crêpe.'

On 9 November, the *Daily Mail* had more hot news 'From our fashion editress':

I was given further details of her wedding gown and the dress to be worn by the bridesmaids at the wedding. The magnificent court train fitted to the shoulders by a clever elastic 'harness' passing beneath the gown, is absolutely without ornament, the white and silver brocade of its material demanding this. It is lined with silver lamé to match the turn-back cuffs, and widens to nine feet at the end. The unbelted gown itself has a very tight skirt developing into a train three to four yards long. The neckline is draped. The bridesmaids' dresses of white crêpe, patterned with silver thread have draped necklines as well, the sleeves being only a little less wide than those of the bridal gown. The skirts billowing out just below the hip-line and the sashes are of silver lamé, tied at the left in front.

All the processions for this wedding set out from Buckingham Palace, since that was where the bride and her parents were staying. The route was no longer turned into a bower of greenery, with triumphal arches and buildings draped in silk (as had been done for the wedding of King George V and Queen Mary in 1893), but London looked festive enough with flags and streamers, and in Bond Street there was a 'great joy bell' made of flowers with garlands trailing from it. The railways ran special cheap fares to town for the day, and 'Vast crowds welcomed Princess Marina as she drove from Buckingham Palace to Westminster Abbey, accompanied by her father, Prince Nicholas of Greece', said the *Illustrated London News.*

Royal weddings now took place an hour earlier than in the previous century, the bride arriving at the Abbey at 11.30 a.m.

The Princess was driven from Buckingham Palace, in a closed State landau, drawn by two Royal Greys, with a coachman on the box. Eleven years earlier, Lady Elizabeth Bowes-Lyon, who had also journeyed to the Abbey in a closed landau (starting from her father's house in Bruton Street), returned to the Palace, with the Duke of York, in the same carriage, but open. That, however, had been an April wedding, and Prince George, Duke of Kent and his bride were to return through the bright

November streets in a Glass Coach, protected from the weather, but clearly visible to the crowd.

During his 'moving address' to the Duke and Duchess of Kent, the Archbishop of Canterbury made a discreet reference to the uniquely large number of guests at their wedding: 'Never in history . . . has a marriage been attended by so vast a company of witnesses. For, by a new and marvellous invention of science, countless multitudes . . . are joining in this service. The whole nation — nay, the whole Empire — are the wedding guests . . . We all wish you happiness.'

Microphones in the Abbey had come to stay.

The next royal wedding, the quiet one, was that of the Duke of Kent's elder brother, Prince Henry, Duke of Gloucester, aged 35, and Lady Alice Montagu-Douglas-Scott, aged 34, daughter of the Duke of Buccleuch. The wedding was planned for Westminster Abbey in the November. It was the same pattern as the previous year. But on 19 October the bride's father died and there was a hurried scaling down with a move to Buckingham Palace Chapel, where Princess Louise of Wales had married the Duke of Fife in 1889.

Norman Hartnell was in charge of the *trousseau* this time and made it a gold lamé and pearl satin wedding in contrast to the Duchess of Kent's silver and white. Except for the bride's sister, 28-year-old Lady Angela Scott, the attendants were younger than usual, four of them wearing short skirts trimmed with swansdown, and ankle socks. Princess Elizabeth, now aged nine, who had been a trainbearer to Princess Marina, was chosen again, and for the first time her sister, the five-year-old Princess Margaret Rose had a public part to play. She was the youngest bridesmaid and, inevitably, stole most of the limelight. The bridegroom 'the tallest member of the Royal Family', who looked and was 'every inch a soldier', wore the magnificent full dress uniform of the 16/5th Lancers, the regiment in which he was serving as a Brevet-Major. His tunic

was superbly frogged and braided and his calf-high boots betasselled and mirror-bright. The bride's bouquet, presented by the Worshipful Company of Gardeners, was 'carried in the crook of her arm so as to accentuate the slim lines of her gown'.

There was a striped awning spanning the pavement outside the Buccleuch house in Grosvenor Place and a carpet for the bride to walk on, when she left for the Palace in a Glass Coach — five minutes early. 'Instead of starting at 11.20, as originally arranged the bride's coach left at 11.15; so that it was due at the Palace at 11.23 instead of at 11.28, for the ceremony at 11.30,' noted the newspapers. A five-minute change in royal plans was bound to cause comment and even Queen Mary mentioned the circumstance in her brief diary round-up:

A lovely day for the wedding of Harry & Alice in the Chapel here. We went down to the Bow Room at 11. Met various members of our family, & saw the bridesmaids who looked charming — Lilibet & Margaret looked too sweet. Alice arrived before 11.30 looking lovely in her wedding dress. We had a beautiful service & the Archbishop of Canterbury gave such a nice address . . . We had luncheon in the supper room, about 120 guests, all our family & many of the Scott family — They left after 3 . . . May God bless the dear Couple.

There were two monster wedding presents, on show with all the rest at St. James's Palace: two table lighters in the shape of grenades with imitation flames shooting from them and two very carefully-written cards, on saying 'Lilibet and MARGARET', the other 'George and Gerald' (sons of Princess Mary, Countess of Harewood). A tribute, no doubt, to Uncle Harry looking every inch a soldier.

At the time of the Duke of York's marriage in 1923, *The Times* said: 'There is but one wedding to which the people look forward with still deeper interest — the wedding which will give a wife to the Heir to the Throne and,

in the course of nature, a future Queen to England and the British peoples.' That wedding was not to take place until 1937, and when it did it was not what *The Times*, or anyone else, had had in mind. Edward Albert Christian George Andrew Patrick David, Prince of Wales (known to his family as David and later to the world as the Duke of Windsor), eldest son of King George V and Queen Mary, had given up his crown and his country the previous December for 'the woman I love'. That woman was the *chic*, notorious Mrs. Wallis Warfield Simpson, a Baltimore socialite, twice divorced. In the autumn of 1936 Cecil Beaton wrote in his diary (*Diaries 1922–1939*): 'The sound of her name implies secrecy, royalty, and being in-the-know. As a topic she has become a mania, so much so that her name is banned in many houses to allow breathing space for other topics.'

In June the following year Beaton was at the Château de Candé, near Tours in France, a privileged photographer, taking pictures of the self-exiled, uncrowned king and his bride, in her hard, blue wedding dress and little blue straw hat, the day before the marriage. Outside the gates there were 'swarms of journalists and their vans and motorcycles'; inside, the flowers were being arranged and telegrams were being dealt with; the 'obscure Darlington vicar', who had come forward 'at the eleventh hour' to perform a religious ceremony, arrived from England; the music room was being gutted of its piano and other furniture for the wedding next day. Thirty-two chairs were placed in rows and a hunt started for a suitable table to use as an altar. The one with the drinks on it was passed up for the chest in the hall:

> . . . a heavily carved, vastly ornate affair of no particular period, with a row of fat caryatids holding up bogus Renaissance carving.
>
> Wallis, rather harassed but not too harassed to laugh, wondered about an altar cloth. Pointing to the caryatids, she drawled, 'We must have something to cover up that row of extra women!'

It was a love match to end all love matches, but it left in its wake a whole nation jilted and bereaved.

On the abdication of King Edward VIII, the next eldest of his brothers, the Duke of York, became King — King George VI; and King George VI's eldest daughter, Princess Elizabeth, became heiress-presumptive to the throne at the age of ten. Her marriage was to be the next of vital importance to the British monarchy, and she chose impeccably. As *The Times* explained:

> By happy accident, the Princess has bestowed her hand in such a way that two apparently divergent opinions about the qualifications of a consort are simultaneously satisfied — the opinions of those on the one hand who would wish him to be a British subject and of those on the other who consider Royal blood essential.

They had known each other since she was 13 and he was 18, a Cadet-Captain at Dartmouth Naval College, and the engagement had only been delayed until after her 21st birthday because her parents could not believe that she had really fallen in love with the first young man she had ever met. So, it was a love match *and* a noble alliance.

Until four months before the engagement, Lieutenant Philip Mountbatten had been known as Prince Philip of Greece. His father was a younger son of the Greek Royal family (a branch of the more ancient Danish royal line) and his mother (a descendant of Queen Victoria's third child, Princess Alice) was a daughter of the first Marquis of Milford Haven and sister to Earl Mountbatten of Burma. The *Illustrated London News*, delving into his ancestry, found they could start off his family tree with Harold Bluetooth, King of Denmark. (Sweyn Forkbeard, King Canute's sister, and Harold, last of the Saxon kings of England, all appeared later.)

Prince Philip's home had been in England since he was 8 years old, and in March 1947 he became a British

subject, relinquishing all his titles, and choosing to call himself Mountbatten (the anglicised version of his mother's name of Battenberg). He was not to remain a humble Lieutenant for long. Shortly before the marriage, in the following November, King George VI honoured both the bride- and bridegroom-to-be with delicate attention to detail, as he explained to his mother, Queen Mary:

I am giving the Garter to Lilibet next Tuesday, November 11th, so that she will be senior to Philip, to whom I am giving it on November 19th. I have arranged that he shall be created a Royal Highness & that the titles of his peerage will be

Baron Greenwich, Earl of Merioneth
Duke of Edinburgh

These will be announced in the morning papers of November 20th, including the Garter.

It is a great deal to give a man all at once, but I know Philip understands his new responsibilities on his marriage to Lilibet.

As with Queen Victoria's Albert, even so much proved to be not quite enough. Lieutenant Mountbatten had been given the title of Royal Highness, but not that of Prince, and though he soon became known as 'Prince Philip' once more, he had no right to the name. It was not until ten year's later, five years after Princess Elizabeth became Queen, that 'Prince' Philip was accorded 'the style and title of Prince of the United Kingdom in recognition of the services which he has rendered to the country and to the life of the Commonwealth'.

Most of the major royal weddings of this century have taken place either in the threat or the aftermath of war. The three early ones followed hard on the heels of the First World War; when the Dukes of Kent and Gloucester married in the 1930s Hitler and Mussolini were flexing their muscles and Abyssinia was being put to 'the sword of Rome'. Now, in November 1947 when Princess Elizabeth was to be married, the Second World War had technically been over for two years, but the scars were

everywhere. Rationing was still in force, London was pockmarked with bomb sites, money was scarce. There was to be no extra seating in the Abbey, since 'the King has decided that in present circumstances, it was undesirable to divert labour for this purpose from housing and other essential work'; instead of the 10,000 places available for the coronation, ten years earlier, there would be only 2,500 for the wedding. The dress ruling, too, reflected the times: 'Morning dress, lounge suits or service dress will be worn by men guests at the wedding. It will be the first time lounge suits have been permitted at a Royal wedding. It is an austerity departure from the tradition of court dress or full dress uniform for such occasions. Women will wear morning dress with hats.'

Only £4,000 was voted by the new Labour Government for decorations; after that, they said, the cost would have to be met by the Privy Purse. Even the list of wedding presents had forlornly utilitarian patches: Princess Margaret's gift to her sister was 'a practical well-designed picnic basket containing cutlery and equipment for four people'. The town of Leamington Spa sent an electric washing machine. Mahatma Gandhi crocheted a piece of lace ('worked by the Indian leader himself'). Northern Ireland's present was a selection of household linen, boxed and ribbon-tied like a draper's display. One solitary pair of nylons, precious then as finest silver, was also put on show, with the more magnificent china, plate, jewels and furniture, at St. James's Palace. A little American girl, used to 'bundles for Britain', sent a live turkey 'bought with money she had saved herself'.

It was announced that no 'full State functions' would be held in honour of the marriage, though 'some of the State rooms of Buckingham Palace, unused since the outbreak of war, have been restored to their pre-war condition'. At the 'wedding breakfast', there would be fewer than 100 guests, including all the visiting royal relatives (whose descent could always be traced back to Queen

Victoria and invariably was). It was a blue and khaki wedding all over again, with the King in uniform on railway platform after railway platform meeting the exalted, uniformed, guests who travelled from all over Europe; many of them were still politely called King and Queen in the British press, though their own countries no longer owned them. Prime Ministers also arrived from all over the Commonwealth, even from New Zealand and Australia, the still astonishing aeroplane making such long distances possible.

One marvellously cheerful note, after the years of blackout: Buckingham Palace was to be floodlit on the night of the wedding, for the first time since the beginning of the war.

The celebrated writer, Rebecca West, having watched the marriage ceremony from the Abbey organ loft, wrote: 'It might have been folly to have a Royal Wedding in winter, but it was wise enough. People are tired of sadness, they need a party; they are tired of hate, they need to think of love; they are tired of evil, they need to think of goodness. And they are persuaded that the Royal Family are good.'

She recalled a scene on the streets of London some days before, when a man selling wedding favours called out: 'Buy a red, white and blue ribbon for the pair that's going to live happily ever after . . . It'll be forever after with this pair, decent people they are.'

The 'poor bits of bunting round the window boxes on government buildings and an advertisement facing the Abbey concerning national savings . . . were the only signs of distress' outside Westminster Abbey. But inside: 'Distinguished Englishmen and their women folk made one think of the Flanagan and Allen song "Nice People with Nice Manners. But Got no Money At All". Shabby top hats, shabby fur coats, fine and disciplined faces.'

There was nothing shabby, however, about the bride's dress, nor those of her attendants. In an orgy of peacetime extravagance, hundreds of girls had spent hundreds of

hours weaving the delicate fabrics and stitching on the individual pearls. (And each girl who had worked on the Princess's gown had worked into it a strand of her own hair — for luck.) Until the Duke of Kent's marriage in 1934, royal wedding gowns were made by ladies — like 'Madame Handley Seymour, the Court Dressmaker of New Bond Street', who was responsible for the tubular dress worn by Princess Elizabeth's mother in 1923. Now, the male *couturier* was firmly entrenched and Norman Hartnell, royal dressmaker, was again asked to design the gowns for a royal wedding.* Three-million silk-worms were kept working overtime in Ayot St. Lawrence, Hertfordshire, to produce the silk to make the satin for the gown; while firms in Dunfermline, Nottingham. Barnoldswick, and even France, started weaving for the *trousseau.*

The *Illustrated London News* described the result:

The dresses designed for her Royal Highness the Bride, Princess Elizabeth, are of great beauty, masterpieces of British design and workmanship . . . Norman Hartnell took his inspiration for the diaphanous beauty of the bridesmaids' ivory silk tulle dresses from Buckingham Palace pictures by Winterhalter, Tuxen and Sir George Hayter. He designed the Princess's wedding dress of ivory Duchesse satin on classic lines. The idea for the hand embroidery on the skirt and bodice and on the Court train of transparent ivory silk tulle fifteen feet long was taken from a Botticelli picture. The pattern features Roses of York, ears of corn, star flowers and orange blossom in pearl and crystal.

The dress had a 'sweetheart' neckline, and the 'voluminous Bridal veil of crisp white tulle' was held by a simple, but stunning, diamond tiara, lent by the Queen, her mother.

The eight bridesmaids (aged from 11 to 24) were not

* Twenty-six years later this pattern was to change again, with Princess Anne choosing to have her wedding dress made by Mrs. Maureen Baker, 'design director' of the 'medium to high price range' off-the-peg dress firm 'Susan Small', the house responsible for most of the Princess's clothes for the previous four years.

quite the traditional mixture: at their head was the 17-year-old Princess Margaret, fresh from the triumph of carrying out her first public engagement alone the previous month (she had launched the new Union Castle liner, the *Edinburgh Castle*). The youngest was the bride's cousin, Princess Alexandra of Kent; then there were a duke's daughter, a marquis's daughter, two daughters and a granddaughter of earls, and the daughter of a baron. All but one were related to the bride, and the war-work of all those old enough to have done any was carefully chronicled. Their dresses were 'Victorian', the frothy skirts scattered with appliquéd blossoms and pearls in a design echoing that of the bride's train. The two page boys (also called train-bearers since they did all the work) were Prince William of Gloucester and Prince Michael of Kent, 5-year-old cousins of the bride. They were the first pages to appear at a royal Abbey wedding since Princess Patricia's in 1919, and one of them, Prince Michael, added an endearing touch of humour to the occasion by getting bored in mid-photo session and giving his 5-year-old tummy a thorough and satisfying scratch.

The 26-year-old bridegroom, who had 'hurried away from the Palace by a side door' the previous night to a bachelor party with 'nine old shipmates' was, according to Rebecca West, late, and 'like many a bridegroom before him, greenish white in complexion'. He wore his naval Lieutenant's uniform, with the star of the Most Noble Order of the Garter, received from the King the day before, and below it the Star of the Greek Order of the Redeemer.

His best man (or 'groomsman' in the more dignified journals) was his cousin, the 28-year-old Marquis of Milford Haven, another descendant of Queen Victoria.

On the grey Thursday morning of the wedding, the Princess and her father left Buckingham Palace in the Irish State Coach 'exactly at the appointed time, 11.16 a.m.' and, with a Sovereign's Escort of the Household Cavalry in full dress, drove through the cheering

crowds to the Abbey. There, at 11.28, the bride stepped down from the coach as a military band played the national anthem and entered the West door of the great vaulted building as the trumpeters played one of the magnificent fanfares written for her by the Master of the King's Musick. Led by choristers, her two small pages holding her train, and her eight bridesmaids following behind, she walked to the altar on the arm of the King. ('I was so proud of you & thrilled at having you so close to me on our long walk in Westminster Abbey, but when I handed your hand to the Archbishop I felt that I had lost something very precious', His Majesty wrote to his daughter a few days later.)

'The day was grey and dark and little light shone through the great rose window of the South Transept', said the *Illustrated London News*; 'red and gold were the dominant notes of this scene of high romance and time-honoured pageantry'.

Up in the organ loft, Wynford Vaughan-Thomas described what was happening for radio listeners and television viewers, while on tall buildings and Admiralty arches outside Richard Dimbleby, Audrey Russell, Lieutenant-Commander Peter Scott and Frank Gilliard awaited the return procession.

In keeping with tradition, the Archbishop of Canterbury conducted the service, which was, as he said in his address, 'in all essentials exactly the same as it would be for any cottager who might be married this afternoon in some small country church in a remote village in the dales'. The royal couple knelt on silk and betasselled cushions placed on the top step of the first of two shallow flights leading up to the high altar. They were flanked on either side (as royal brides had been in St. George's Chapel, Windsor) by rows of closest family and most illustrious guests. On this occasion there were fifty-two such privileged spectators — among them five kings (ruling or exiled), eight queens and two regents. It was said to be the greatest gathering of royalty of the century. The promises

made, and the union blessed, the choir sang an anthem while the Princess and her husband, her mother and father, her grandmother, Queen Mary, the bridegroom's mother, Princess Alice of Greece, with the Archbishop of Canterbury, in his white and golden vestments, made their way to the chapel of Edward the Confessor where the register was signed. The bride and bridegroom were last to return, waiting for stillness once more before enacting what has come to be one of the most exquisite moments of modern royal weddings. Another fanfare filled the Abbey with a shower of sound as the Princess and the Duke walked from the chapel and stood again before the altar; then, with the full length of her train spread out behind her, the bride curtseyed in deep obeisance to Their Majesties, her parents, while her husband beside her bowed. A moment later, to the joyous sound of Mendelssohn's *Wedding March* in a simple procession, led only by a court usher and followed by their eleven bridal attendants, the Princess Elizabeth and the Duke of Edinburgh walked out of the Abbey 'to be received into the hearts of the people'.

One-hundred-thousand of those people strained against the police barrier near the Palace to see the royal carriages arrive. 'Although in keeping with post-war austerity, the decorations and arrangements could not compare with previous occasions, the number of people who assembled in London for the Royal wedding to demonstrate their loyalty and affection was greater than that on previous State occasions.' Between bouts of community singing, there were chants of 'We want the bride! — We want the Princess!' which brought the royal party out on to the central balcony of the Palace three times before the Princess and the Duke of Edinburgh left in the early November dusk for Waterloo Station and the first part of their honeymoon. In an open landau, drawn by two white horses, with a magnificently liveried postilion in front, and two top-hatted footmen behind, bride and bridegroom travelled to the station in the manner Queen Victoria's child-

ren had made tradition. The Duke's uniform (minus decorations) and the Princess's 'love-in-the-mist' blue wool coat (cut in the 'Princess style') and her hard, high beret hat, were still covered with paper rose petals, thrown by the royal guests, when they stepped from the carriage and a great cheer went up from the crowd as the Princess's favourite Corgi stepped out after them. The Royal train pulled out at 4.20 p.m. and arrived at Winchester at 5.44 (royal times are always wonderfully precise). The Mayor of Winchester (a lady, Mrs. D. Crompton) was there to greet the honeymooners, with Lord Templemore and other local dignitaries. The Princess was presented with a huge bouquet which she managed to hold on to, along with the Corgi's lead. A royal limousine took them the last part of the journey to Broadlands, near Romsey, Hampshire, once owned by Lord Palmerston, now the home of Earl Mountbatten of Burma, uncle of the bridegroom, and lent by him 'for the first part of the honeymoon'.

In London that night, 'austerity was thrown aside' as the nation celebrated. At the Savoy, the Berkeley and Claridge's a new cocktail appeared on the wine list — 'Wedding Bells'; a 'Gala dinner dance' at the Mayfair hotel was advertised: 'Dinner, cocktail or sherry, half a bottle of champagne, brandy or liqueur, coffee, dancing, £3 per person.' Quaglino's promised 'decorations inside and outside', a souvenir menu card and a 'surprise dish by the chef'. Journalists were scandalised to find many a London hotel had charged £100 for guests staying in town the whole wedding week.

Buckinghamshire magistrates sourly refused permission for the bar of a Town Hall to stay open an extra half hour for a wedding night dance, saying it was not a 'special occasion': only the usual licence extension to 12.30 would be granted. But there were not many mean spirits abroad. Throughout the land, dance floors glittered with more renovated finery than had been seen since the first hectic days of war; the sound of the big band, the quickstep and the old-fashioned waltz; the spot-prizes, the Paul Joneses;

the paper hats and paper streamers, made it seem like a marvellous new beginning to good old-fashioned pleasures: a fairy-tale come true.

Next day Reuter's reported that 3,000 people queued outside Westminster Abbey to see the marriage register with the seven names of the main wedding party signed in the Abbey, and the many more added later at Buckingham Palace. 'Women from America, France, India and Africa stood side by side with British housewives, some with their shopping baskets.'

The following week, thousands more went to view the wedding presents at St. James's Palace, to which the wedding gown and one of the bridesmaids' dresses had been added.

Thirteen years later when Princess Margaret married the atmosphere could not have been more different. In place of post-war austerity, there was the booming Britain of the 1960s, of Prime Minister Harold Macmillan and the slogan 'You've never had it so good'. It was the new Elizabethan era, with another young Queen Elizabeth on the throne. The marriage was to be in May and the May of 1960 was particularly bright and warm.

The bride had always been newsworthy and slightly unpredictable: in the early days there had been the night-clubbing 'Margaret Set', then the romance with a divorced man, a former Palace equerry, now there was the photographer, Mr. Antony Armstrong-Jones — 'a man whom few people before February 26 would have placed high on the list of candidates for her hand.' Speculation about what she would wear was intense, for both the bride and the bridegroom were known to 'love clothes and have an abiding interest in fashions. He, in fact, has held a show of highly original ski-ing garments.' Norman Hartnell, King of the Sequin and the Bugle Bead, was once again in charge.

Speculation on what Mr. Armstrong-Jones would wear was equally intense. He was the first royal bridegroom

who could lay no claim to a uniform. The obvious solution was morning dress. But morning dress for a royal bridegroom? It seemed so strange.

The royal yacht *Britannia* was to be used for a Caribbean honeymoon — a break with tradition which caused many a raised eyebrow, and voice. Previous royal honeymoons had followed the same pattern as Princess Elizabeth's: the first week or so at a charming private house loaned by a relative or friend, with one session for press photographers and an appearance at church; then a move to Scotland or Ireland for several more weeks of seclusion. It was all very dignified, patriotic — and cheap. Now, the royal yacht was being spruced up from stem to stern for a costly, if romantic, six-week voyage: 'Seventy painters were employed and will probably have used 144 gallons, including twenty-four gallons of royal blue on the hull, thirty gallons of white on the upper works, and six gallons of buff on the masts and funnel', reported the *Illustrated London News*, without further comment; 260 officers and men would sail with her.

Westminster Abbey was sand-blasted of centuries of grime without, painted and gilded within (though this, it was said, would have been done anyway).

Tall masts topped by golden coronets went up along the Mall, with nylon banners bearing the initials of bride and bridegroom, fluttering beneath. Outside Clarence House, where the Princess lived with her mother, Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother, 30,000 pink roses were fashioned into a double arch spanning the Mall and rising sixty feet high.

The bridesmaids were chosen, and all were to be children, aged from 6 to 12, with 9-year-old Princess Anne heading them. (It would be her second time as bridesmaid, the first having been six months earlier at the wedding of her distant cousin, Lady Pamela Mountbatten.) Having only child attendants was another break with royal tradition, but this time it was favourably received. Both bride and bridegroom were 'petite'; small bridesmaids

would be 'suitable'. A best man of more-or-less appropriate size was also chosen, but the press, digging deep into his past, discovered a hint of scandal which they presented to the world. The best man was then found to have jaundice and retired on medical grounds. A new best man was chosen: Dr. Roger Gilliatt, 'tall, dark and commanding', who was to tower over the small cortège like a gaunt guardian angel.

The Dean of Westminster held a press conference, and asked journalists to 'put over' the spiritual significance of the ceremony.

Disregarding both the day's reputation for bad luck, and Ovid's reference to the kind of lady who married in that particular month, Princess Margaret chose Friday, 6 May, for her wedding, and the sun shone its defiance of all superstition. (Next day, she was to be called 'The Sunshine Bride'.) Shirt-sleeved crowds, six to eight deep, all with small Union Jacks to wave, lined the route from the Mall to the Abbey. (And 1,215 of them were to faint and be scooped up by the St. John's Ambulance Brigade before the day was out) First they watched the Queen, the Queen Mother, and 11-year-old Prince Charles, in Highland dress, ride past together in Queen Alexandra's State Coach, with a Sovereign's Escort of the Household Cavalry in attendance. Then, into the Mall, from Clarence House, and under the arch of roses, came the maroon State Glass Coach, lined with blue silk, with the bride and her brother-in-law, the Duke of Edinburgh, who was to give her away.

At the Abbey, the dress 'which had caused so much speculation before the wedding, aroused complete admiration. It was of extremely simple design and set off effectively the magnificent tiara which the Princess wore. It was made from white silk organza with a closely-fitted bodice with a high V-neckline. The skirt consisted of three layers of organza over hundreds of yards of tulle, cut into twelve panels that widened down from the waist to hem. Her shoes were made of white crêpe with a white satin

facing running round the edges. Her bouquet was of orchids.'

Apart from the tiara there was not a gem or a piece of embroidery to be seen, and the result was breathtaking in its surprising simplicity. The veil of fine white tulle with a narrow binding of organdie, had been designed and made by Claude Saint-Cyr of Paris, and the tiara was nestling against the first royal hair-piece to be put on public view. (At this time the Princess wore the 'Chrysanthemum cut', which she had helped to make fashionable, yet here was a large, glossy 'bun' on the top of her head! It was thought to be very progressive indeed.)

'The bridesmaids' dresses were based, at Princess Margaret's request, on the first evening dress that Mr. Norman Hartnell designed for her — when she was seventeen. It was a favourite with her father. They are frilly dresses, with puff sleeves, decorated with panels of *broderie anglaise* with pale blue ribbon slotted through. Their bouquets are all of lilies-of-the-valley — the flower *par excellence* of early May.'

The wedding ceremony was particularly praised for the music and interesting for two changes from the normal pattern: the Beatitudes were read in place of the usual sermon, and 'the Archbishop included in the service an ancient ritual, the binding of the hands at the moment the ring is blessed by the officiating priest'. For the exchange of vows, 'to have and to hold', bride and bridegroom held hands.

Then, after the signing of the register, the bride 'curtsied gaily to her sister', walked in simple procession to the Abbey's West door, passed under the striped awning between a guard of honour formed by members of the regiments of which she was Colonel-in-Chief, and entered the same Glass Coach for the ride back to Buckingham Palace with her husband, through 'delirious crowds'.

There had been 2,000 people in the Abbey, but once again the reception was small: '120 guests were entertained to a family wedding breakfast in the lofty white

and gold ball supper room of the Palace,' reported Reuter's.

At 1.20 p.m. the wedding party appeared on the balcony to wave to the massed crowds surrounding the Palace. Later there was a grand family send-off, with over a hundred cheering royal guests lining the steps of the Grand Entrance, and then racing across the quadrangle, the ladies holding up their long skirts, to fling one last handful of paper rose petals as bride and bridegroom left by open car for Tower Pier and the royal yacht.

The Princess's 'going-away clothes, by Victor Stiebel, were of pale sunshine yellow. The coat was of pure silk shantung cut straight and loose with a small upstanding collar and three-quarter sleeves. Her dress was of a double layer of draped fine silk chiffon with small sleeves.'

The open car, unaccompanied by any other vehicle, drove through the City in brilliant sunshine to the Thames. The ship had been dressed over all since 8 a.m. that morning; now her decks were lined with her men and the band of the Royal Marines was playing calypso music. As she stepped aboard; the Princess's banner was hoisted at the main mast. At 5.30 p.m. the *Britannia* sailed; ships' sirens, hooters and church bells sounded in salute as she began to move slowly downstream from the Pool of London with the Princess and her husband standing on the bridge to acknowledge the cheers. The promenade at Gravesend was trimmed with bunting and crowded to over-flowing as they passed. At Southend, an estimated 10,000 were crammed onto the pier, and thirty boats went out to greet the bride.

For this slightly prodigal Princess, the country had truly killed a fatted calf.

Six weeks, and many photographs of a progressively bronzed bride and bridegroom later, the *Britannia* returned to Portsmouth, where the Royal Marine band was seen to be still on board, and heard to be still playing calypsos.

A year and one month after Princess Margaret's wedding, came the marriage of the young Duke of Kent, son of Princess Marina and Prince George, Duke of Kent, who had died in a Second World War aircrash when his eldest son was six. Once again the newspaper statisticians had a field-day: this time it was the bride who was non-royal, 'the first untitled girl to marry a Royal Duke since Tudor times'. York Minster, which had been chosen for the ceremony had 'not been the scene of a royal wedding since King Edward III married Philippa of Hainault there in 1328'. The Kent family, like Princess Patricia of Connaught earlier in the century, has always been particularly popular in Britain, and the Duke of Kent was thought to have chosen well. His bride was not royal, but her family was wealthy and distinguished. Her father, Sir William Worsley, had been Lord Lieutenant of the North Riding of Yorkshire for ten years, and lived in the beautiful Hovingham Hall, twenty miles from York.

The Queen and the Duke of Edinburgh, Princess Margaret and Mr. Antony Armstrong-Jones, the 12-year-old Prince Charles, in dark suit and huge white carnation, and many other British and foreign royalties travelled north for the occasion and there was the biggest party afterwards of any British royal wedding this century: a large marquee was set up near the cricket pitch at the bride's home and more than 2,000 guests were invited to the feast.

There were other departures from the royal pattern at this wedding too. It was an afternoon ceremony, and the bride arrived at the Minster with her tulle veil over her face. She had eight bridesmaids, 'a galaxy of youthful beauties,' but they were nearly all small nieces, cousins or god-daughters, with Princess Anne among them for the third time. Her three pages wore white satin jackets and knickerbockers, with black, silver-buckled shoes, instead of kilts. Cars, not carriages, were used throughout, the bride and bridegroom returning to Hovingham from the Minster in a very modern bubble-top limousine lent to

them by the Queen. It was the only major royal wedding not to be celebrated by the Archbishop of Canterbury: the Most Reverend Dr. Michael Ramsey, Archbishop of York, did the deed, but, by chance, he was also Archbishop-designate of Canterbury at the time. And they were the first royal couple to fly off on their honeymoon – spending the first part of it at the 18th century mansion Birkhall, on the Balmoral estate, where the Queen and Prince Philip had spent the second part of their honeymoon fourteen years earlier.

Miss Katherine Worsley's wedding dress was particularly approved. It was made by John Cavanagh, who had once worked for Molyneux, designer of Princess Marina's *trousseau* in 1934, and it was again almost starkly simple: made of white gauze, with a design of silver thread woven into it so that it shimmered. The bodice and long sleeves were very closely fitting, while the skirt swept out from the tiny waist to form a fifteen-foot train behind. The bridesmaids were in simple white organdie.

Two years later when the Duke of Kent's sister, Princess Alexandra, married (in Westminster Abbey, once more), there was a greater gathering of British and European royalty than at any time since the wedding of the Queen, and the Queen herself laid on two delightful entertainments for them. Two days before the ceremony, there was the 'largest ball held at Windsor in the last hundred years': a magnificent occasion with the Castle floodlit and 2,000 guests, arriving in sleek cars, a-blaze with more diamonds than Aladdin found in his cave. Next morning these glittering creatures were given a probably greater treat: at a not-too-early hour, they were loaded into charabancs and taken on a tour of Windsor Great Park and forest, with a midday stop at the Hind's Head Hotel, Bray, for lunch. The Duke of Edinburgh did some of the commentary, especially when they rounded the polo ground, and the Queen got a thorn in her thumb, which the massive King Olaf of Norway delicately removed. It

was a royal mystery coach tour, and quite obviously an enormous success.

Royal brides have things thrown at them on their wedding day just like anyone else, and it is largely due to them that the up-dating of the missiles has been so well chronicled. When Princess Mary married in 1922, her mother wrote of 'throwing rice & little paper horse shoes & rose leaves after them', and the newspapers published photographs of the bride and groom being 'pelted by lucky horseshoes and silver slippers by the King, the Duke of York, Prince Henry and Prince George'. The following years, when the Duke of York married Lady Elizabeth Bowes-Lyon, the *Illustrated London News* said: 'As they started from the Palace they were bombarded with confetti and rose-petals and both looked supremely happy. The Queen herself dropped a shower of confetti upon them from the balcony.' Rice was out, and rose petals were in to stay. At the wedding of the Duke of Kent in 1934, the throwing of paper rose petals was seen as 'another British feature' of an occasion which was 'practically all British in character', and there were photographs of patriotic 'disabled ex-Servicemen' making them.

Confetti (the word for the tiny sweetmeats hurled by the crowd at fiestas in Italy) suddenly appeared in the English vocabulary at the beginning of the century and referred to the kind of mixed bag of paper symbols — horseshoes, slippers and hearts — which Queen Mary described. Soon afterwards very small circles of multi-coloured tissue paper were introduced, under the same name. Being the cheapest form of artillery on the market they quickly became the most popular and when this type of confetti came in, very little more rice was thrown in Britain — and vergers mutered un-Christian oaths as they tried to sweep up the new invention from the church porch, with no help from the birds, who had soon taken care of the rice. Now their patience is tested even further, by the use of computer punchings, scooped up off office floors, absolutely

free and therefore more popular than ever — except with the bride and bridegroom (being made of card they are hard and sharp) and the verger again (being hard and minuscule, they are impossible to sweep up and won't blow away or dissolve with rain). In Yorkshire, where thrift is considered a cardinal virtue, they have had to be banned from at least one parish: in 1972, the vicar of Birkenshaw in the West Riding, said 'no more'.

The throwing of satin slippers did not continue long into the 20th century, but old boots, thrown at less genteel weddings in the 1800s, have remained, and tying them to the bumpers of honeymoon cars has become a popular wedding sport. Rolls of toilet paper are also employed in the same manner. To escape this undignified start to married life, many a honeymoon couple sets off from the wedding party in a borrowed car, leads determined followers around the neighbourhood in a Hollywood-style chase, doubles back, picks up the proper car when the coast is clear, and finally sets off, alone at last, for the wedding trip.

In the 19th century details of where the honeymoon was to be spent were often given at the end of the wedding notice; this century, except for royal honeymoons, the plans have been kept as top secret as the bride's dress. Most girls still think it is bad luck for the bridegroom to see the wedding gown before the wedding day, though I know of one bride who married in 1970 in the dress she was wearing the night she and her husband first met — it happened to be white lace and high-necked, but I'm not sure that had much to do with it; and now that young men are turning peacock again, I've heard of several of them helping their brides to choose the dress — and making sure it sets off what they want to wear.

Another superstition which remains more or less unchallenged is the belief that bride and bridegroom should not see each other on the wedding day until they meet at the altar. There are, of course, couples who rise from the same bed, put on the clothes they have chosen together, and stroll round to the church or registry office hand in

hand, and there always have been — a joke of the 1920s involved a couple kneeling at the altar and displaying the same room number chalked on the soles of their shoes — but they are still not in the majority.

Meeting a chimney sweep on your wedding day is lucky (and nowadays not too likely), but you have to speak to him or touch him.

A pig running across the road in front of a bride is a sign of evil (says one book of superstitions), but happily it is a hazard not too many girls have to face up to.

Carrying the bride over the threshold of her new home is a tradition still going strong from Roman days. A Liverpuddlian who married in 1920 tells me it was then thought of as 'carrying the *virgin* bride over the threshold' and she well remembers having it done to her. Now the custom depends more on the law of the possible than the laws of morality. A bridegroom who sizes up the proposition and has any doubts about it, is wisest to leave things alone.

The wedding superstition with the greatest following of all in the 20th century is that a bride should wear:

> Something old, something new,
> Something borrowed, and something blue

and possibly, 'a silver sixpence in her shoe'. This is usually described as 'ancient' and 'traditional', its origins 'lost in the mists of time', but John Cordy Jeaffreson, who wrote on every conceivable and inconceivable aspect of the wedding in 1872 did not mention it, nor did that other mine of marriage lore, Dr. Brand in his *Popular Antiquities.* (Neither of them mention tossing the bouquet, either — another wedding custom which is younger than it looks.) Most 20th century books of quotations and phrases and fables also ignore 'Something old, something new', but a sprightly friend in her mid-eighties tells me: 'My Mother was married in 1889, and she used it at her wedding. When I was married first in 1922, I heard it for the first time from her, as she pinned a "blue" bow on to

the bottom of my youthful corselette just before I went to Church! The "old" was covered by my great-great-grand-mother's wedding veil, the "new" by other garments!'

In America I know of a 1914 bride who followed the custom, also minus the sixpence in the shoe; but by 1966, when Luci Baines Jonson married, the coin was firmly established as part of the magic and she had several sent to her from well-wishers across the States. The other charms she used to bring her luck were a 58-year-old lace handkerchief made by her great-grandmother, a rosary given to her sister by Pope John XXIII, and a gold locket tied with blue ribbon. She also had her name and the date of the wedding day embroidered in blue on the hem of her wedding gown, which could have served for the 'something blue', too.

This century has also seen two brand new customs — one from America and one from England. The first is the 'shower' — a party given by the bride's friends shortly before the wedding when each brings a small gift for the new home. It is something like the 'bidden weddings' of old, when the neighbours were all expected to contribute to the new bride's household; but, now, the party is arranged by the girl's friends, instead of her family, and is, as a rule, restricted to her own contemporaries and her own sex. Often it is specifically a 'Kitchen Shower' or a 'Bathroom Shower', or some other kind of shower, and all the presents are aimed at kitting out that one room. The gift-wrap manufacturers do a nice line in wrapping paper with such events in mind — usually dotted with a design of open umbrellas. This kind of party has been popular in America since very early in the century, but only drifted across the Atlantic in the 1950s.

The other custom, which began in the City of London in or around 1967, is a great deal more curious, and bears no resemblance to anything else at all. There, and now in many other British cities, when a girl leaves her office job to get married she is 'dressed' by her colleagues 'according

to their abilities'. The clothes can range from crêpe paper dresses to woollen gloves and ribbon bows. There is always a headdress of some kind and when the bride-to-be leaves for home she is expected to travel all the way in her astonishing office *trousseau.*

In the 1970s the real *trousseaux* of the swinging young can be almost as surprising. A 1973 bride, marrying, to please her parents, at St. Margaret's, Westminster (which usurped top society favour from St. George's, Hanover Square, sometime mid-century), collected this list together for her honeymoon (in Greece) and after:

12 pairs of tights
1 bra
2 packs of paper panties
1 pair suede lace-up-to-the-knee boots with platform soles
2 trouser suits
1 pair blue jeans
2 skinny-knit sweaters
1 'absolutely super beach thing' (a wrap-around, long skirt; a top, with short sleeves, tying under the bosom and leaving the midriff bare; plus a tiny bikini – all in filmy printed lawn. 'It cost £40 — but it will do for *everything*!')
1 mini-skirt
1 ankle-length 'granny dress' for day wear
1 slightly longer and barer dress for evening wear.

No nightdresses? '*No one* wears anything to sleep in any more!' No *negligée* or dressing-gown? 'Heavens! I wear an old shirt when I have to. I'll borrow one of Chris's.' Hardly any underclothes? 'Well, I have bought one bra. But I don't expect I'll wear it.'

The bridegroom on the other hand was packing for the honeymoon: 1 lace shirt, 2 lace-trimmed shirts, a genuine hand-embroidered Japanese kimono, and six pairs of stretch bikini brief underpants, ranging in colour from sky-blue with flowers to fire-engine red.

And so the tradition continues. Each generation sifts the ingredients and comes up with a slightly different version of the well-known wedding cake. As the years go by, some things new are added, some things old return, and some people ignore, as some people always have ignored the whole glittering confection. But, like the visions in a kaleidoscope, the pieces are all there, waiting only to be shaken to produce a pattern to suit every changeless 'happy couple'.

'Why do not you marry, Hugo?' said Bertram.

'I respect the institution,' said Hugo, 'which is admitting something in these days; and I have always thought that every woman should marry, and no man.'

The Rt. Hon Benjamin Disraeli, *Lothair*, 1870.

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